

Bhakti Yoga Sagar

Swami Satyananda Saraswati



VOLUME FIVE

Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India

Bhakti Yoga
Sagar

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With kind regards, ॐ and prem

Sriani Niranjan

Bhakti Yoga Sagar

(Ocean of the Yoga of Devotion)

Swami Satyananda Saraswati

*Satsangs at Sri Panch Dashnam Paramahansa Alakh
Bara, Rikhia, Deoghar, during Sita Kalyanam,
from 26 November to 4 December 1997.*

VOLUME FIVE



Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India

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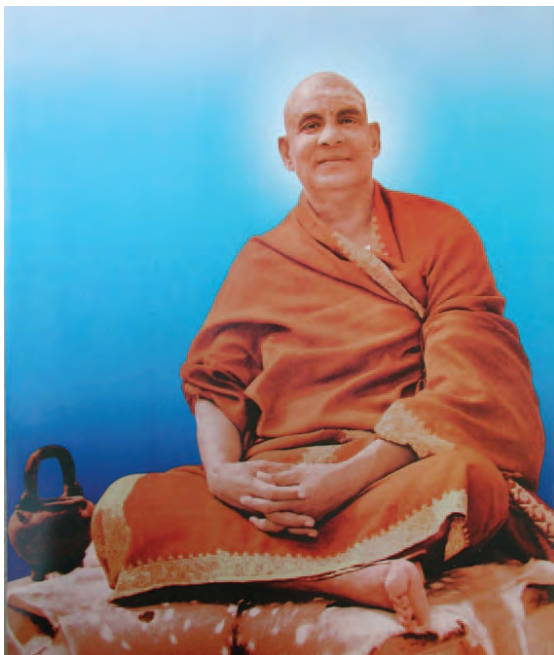
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Dedication

*In humility we offer this dedication to
Swami Sivananda Saraswati, who initiated
Swami Satyananda Saraswati into the secrets of yoga.*

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Satsang 1

November 24, 1997

Just as fragrance is always present in a flower, devotion and belief in God are innate to the human heart. Just as coolness is the nature of the moon and heat is the nature of the sun, faith is the nature of human beings. *Shraddha* and *bhakti*, faith and devotion, are inborn qualities; they do not need to be imported from outside. Just as the body is infused with prana, faith and devotion are imbedded in the human heart right from birth. Faith is inherent in each and everyone. Just as the tree is hidden in the seed, butter in milk, fire in wood and Brahman in jiva, faith is dormant and latent within each and every human being. This is the first thing that you should accept and remember well.

Shraddha or faith is not overt or visible. Can you see the wheat plant in a grain of wheat? Even if you shred or crush the seed into powder, the wheat plant does not become visible. It will come to light only when you sow the grain. Otherwise you may dissect each grain of wheat, scrutinize it under a microscope, subject it to chemical analysis, and yet the wheat plant hidden in the wheat grain will never show up. The wheat seed has to be sown in the proper soil for it to become visible. Similarly, faith cannot be explored outside; it needs to be awakened from within. The first inspirer of faith is the mother, the second is the ishta devata and the third is the guru. A grain of wheat needs soil to germinate into a

wheat plant, then it needs air and sunlight. In the same way, the shraddha that is already there within you needs to be awakened.

Basis of faith

The mother is the first symbol or basis of faith. If you have no faith in your own mother, you are robbed of faith in life. Your faith can then never deepen or develop. It does not matter what kind of a mother you have. Her appearance, beauty, nature, intelligence, qualities, education and talent are all irrelevant as far as faith is concerned. After all, a mother is a mother, however imperfect she may be. One small example is seen in the life of Sri Shankaracharya. When he was barely eight years old, he left home to take sannyasa. His mother gave her consent on one condition, that he would perform her last rites when she died.

Sri Shankaracharya hoisted the flag of Vedic religion in all directions. He attained the epoch-making victory of spreading the Vedic religion throughout India. He was scaling the heights of this mission in north India when his mother breathed her last, thousands of miles away, but he kept his word and rushed all the way down south to fulfil the promise he had made to her. A sannyasin is not supposed to take part in the funeral of a deceased person, but he bravely broke the tradition and performed his mother's last rites with his own hands. Such was the depth of his faith in his mother. Such an unwavering faith can defy tradition, flout the dictums of the shastras, make the smritis pale into insignificance and render all the mandates of the scriptures meaningless.

The second basis of faith is the *ishta devata*, or chosen deity. Etymologically, *devata* means 'that which radiates, illumines, enlightens, sheds light on, dispels darkness'. The devata is the one who lights up the darkness and reveals the hidden essence. There are as many devatas as there are people. Some worship Vishnu, some Shiva, some Ganesha or Hanuman as their ishta devata. The indigenous aboriginals worship

Mahadeva. The Bengalis worship Durga and Kali. You may not see your ishta devata or have any logical proof of its existence, but you still worship your chosen deity regularly.

The third basis of faith is the guru. If your faith in the guru is strong and unchallenged, then the guru becomes equal to God for you. Everything then follows like a dream sequence. This is what the *Shvetashvatara Upanishad* (v. 23) tells us:

*Yasya deve paraa bhaktiryathaa deve tathaa gurau.
Tasyaite kathitaa hyarthaah prakaashante mahaatmanaha.
Prakaashante mahaatmanaha.*

It means, “Then these supreme truths imparted to the right souls, who are greatly devoted to God as well as to guru, shine brightly. However, they shine brightly only in those souls who are most deserving.” Thus, the one who has abiding faith in the ishta devata and the guru alike attains enlightenment.

Test of faith

It is not difficult to have faith in the devatas, who are regarded as superhuman godly beings. They neither sleep nor eat, nor do they fall sick or die. They are above all human imperfections and weaknesses. But it is difficult to have faith in the guru who is embodied as a mortal human. This is a tough test of one’s faith. Your faith in the mother may be unshakeable, your faith in the devata may never shatter, but your faith in the guru is very fragile and vulnerable, because the guru lives in a human body and is subject to the laws of *prakriti* or nature. As a human being, the guru is full of human traits and limitations. He may be fat or thin, grow a beard or be clean shaven, be handsome or ugly, dark or fair, speak in English or Hindi, get angry or remain cool and be subjected to scandal or disrepute.

Thus, being subject to the laws of nature, the guru becomes the hardest test for a disciple’s faith. I learnt this about fifty or sixty years ago, when I was just in my teens and

took my first step on the spiritual path under the tutelage of a tantric guru in Nainital. She gave me *shaktipat*, which is a glimpse, a peep into an extraordinary vision, a fleeting sample of the deep psychic and mystic experiences one is destined to have later on, as one progresses further along the spiritual path. She gave me my first exposure to that kind of experience and told me I would have to endeavour to work towards a fully-fledged experience of God and his light.

This experience was like that of Kakabhushundi or Yashoda. It was a transcendental, trance-like experience of an extraordinary dimension, an experience in which the wisdom of epochs is compressed. Such an experience occurs once in many lifetimes, the memory of which can be etched through the different incarnations the soul passes through. The yogini completely captivated me with this experience and the encounter with her was thus fraught with danger. It was she who put the thought of sannyasa into my mind. Before meeting her, I had never thought of sannyasa. The idea of taking sannyasa captured me only after I met her. She changed my destiny, the course of my life. Otherwise, I was a man of action, interested in working hard, earning good money, climbing up the rungs of personal ambition, prospering and enjoying life.

So, it is extremely difficult to maintain unwavering faith in one's guru. Even the faith of the best disciples falters and they leave their guru, finding him to be unsuitable. They denounce their guru because they find he does not conform to their own ideals of what a guru should be like. What a paradox! Should the guru comply with your wishes or should you come up to his expectations? The guru does not fit into any preconceived mould. After worshipping the devata, you should define your relationship with the guru. According to the Vedic tradition, the connection between guru and disciple is as unbreakable as that between husband and wife. All this boils down to one single point – faith, which you have to search for within the recesses of your own mind and discover for yourself.

What is the best way to manage our wishes, desires and aspirations?

These are all different words that point to one basic principle, in the same way as rasagulla, pedha, rasmalai, chamcham and chhena are all the names of sweets made from one single substance, which is milk. Do not bother about the different names. Basically, from time immemorial man has cherished one resolve deep within himself which cannot be uprooted, and that is the desire to become many. According to the Upanishads, man inherited this primordial desire from Brahman or paramatma, who became bored being alone and sought to become many. This basic desire is, therefore, indestructible. So, desires, wishes and cravings, *kamana*, *ichcha* and *vasana*, are endless. Even the wish for *moksha*, liberation, or *bhakti* is a desire. The form has changed, but basically it is one and the same wish.

The saints, mahapurushas, spiritual masters and godmen tell us that the river of desire flows in two opposite directions – good and bad, auspicious and inauspicious. We all have thoughts which flow in good and bad directions. Where there are good thoughts there is prosperity and happiness. You have good thoughts for your near and dear ones, such as your children and friends, but you also entertain bad thoughts about people whom you dislike. You think well of those who are nice to you and ill of those who treat you with disrespect. So, good and bad thoughts are the two reactions of the mind. It is not the real nature of the mind, but a reactionary nature. Thus, the mind has two natures, the natural and the reactionary. Mind is the supreme manager, the chief secretary, and good and bad reactions are its modulations.

Channel the desires into good actions

Therefore, you should leave the mind alone. Do not attack the reactionary mind for its desires, wishes and cravings. Do not hate your desires or feel guilty about having them. Sometimes you feel upset at seeing your bad thoughts, but this does not help. You will have to pave a way, set a trend,

and create a channel to direct the bad thoughts into good ones. The shastras tell us to put the inauspicious thoughts on an auspicious track. Auspicious or good thoughts are generated by good actions, good turns done to others. Thus I keep telling you to get involved in good works. Start doing good to others and to yourselves. Singing God's name, visiting pilgrimage places, temples and places of worship are good acts. Serving the country or community, building hospitals, schools and orphanages are good actions, but the best action is to help women, because the female principle is the basis of creation.

All heroes, saints and godly men are born of women. Rama, Krishna and Hanuman were all born of women. Hanuman was not born in a Maruti factory, he was born of a mother. Women are the manufacturing plants for babies. Therefore, if you serve women well, the babies of the coming generation will be of a high quality. The baby daughters born of good mothers will not be mentally deficient and dull, but intelligent and capable. In the present times, the best action is service to the mother. I have used the word woman to convey mother. You should serve the mother, your own as well as others.

Those small girls sitting here are all future mothers. If you serve them, you will find that the turmoil of desires and passions within you will subside and you will be serene. The root cause of desire and passion is a woman. If you begin to serve this root cause, the result will be amazing. The passions and cravings will be subdued and toned down. Our shastras tell us that man has three basic desires: desire for a woman, desire for wealth and desire for progeny. Nobody is free from these three desires. There are hardly any exceptions to this rule. Those who try to find freedom from these desires through sadhana are wasting their time, because they will never be successful. I was never freed from the desire for progeny. Instead of sons, I got disciples. I wanted to get away from money and wealth, so here I am sitting amidst gold and silver. This is the law of nature which cannot be avoided.

The law of nature tells us to walk along the natural path. These three desires are part of human nature, just like hunger, sleep and excretion. At the same time, you can manage these basic instincts with proper awareness and regulation. Desires are present in all stages of life: brahmacharya ashrama, grihastha ashrama, vanaprastha ashrama, but the objects of desire change according to one's age. In childhood one desires toys, games and sports like cricket and hockey. In youth one desires wealth, women and progeny. In the later stages of life one does not continue with the same desires. *Grihastha ashrama*, householder life, is followed by *vanaprastha ashrama*, retirement. Retirement and old age succeed youth and middle age, so the objects of desire must change accordingly.

Vanaprastha ashrama should make way for sannyasa ashrama. Sannyasa is necessary because it provides an opportunity to give your desires a new direction. It is a turning point. I do not claim to be free of desire. If I were to make such a false claim, it would be dishonest. But I have given a new turn to my desires. During youth and middle age you lead a life of *bhoga*, pleasure, but when old age comes the desires never wane; they still play havoc. Therefore, at that time the shastras suggest you turn towards sannyasa life. Either you shave your head and enter an ashram or open a hospital and involve yourself in a life of service. Once your mind is engrossed in the work of the hospital, the desires will change their direction and form.

Transformation not suppression

Ultimately, the desires should be channelled in such a way that they lead to desirelessness. The desires should be sublimated or transformed in such a way that they no longer remain personal. Serving others selflessly and doing good turns will transform your desires into noble inclinations. If you are thinking of killing your desires, you will never succeed, and I will also tell you why you will not succeed. Paramatma is inactive, a mere witness, like a passive watchdog, but when he comes in contact with

prakriti, the three shaktis, powers or capabilities rise within him. He begins to have *ichcha shakti*, the power of desire or motivation, *kriya shakti*, the ability to act for the fulfilment of desire, and *jnana shakti*, the capacity to know and recognize. Purusha manifests these powers only after union with prakriti.

Once purusha is associated with prakriti, he then comes within her purview. Hence paramatma begins to abide by the laws of prakriti. Sri Rama and Sri Krishna both did the same when they incarnated in human form. Once paramatma becomes linked with prakriti, he too begins to have the same desires which reside and work through all beings. This is the primordial origin of desire. So, man is born into a physical body with desire, and nobody can say, "I am free from desire."

Didn't Mirabai have passion? Why did she look upon Sri Krishna as her husband and not as her son, father or brother? She had passion, therefore, she chose the Lord as her husband and lover. The words that Mirabai uses in her poetry are all charged with eroticism: *Giridhara mero sacho piya* – "Giridhara is my real husband"; *Main to Giridhara ke ghar jaoongi* – "I will go to the house of Giridhara." But the difference is that her passion was directed towards God and so it elevated her; it took her to sublime heights. It was the same with Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. Even in Christianity the idea of a conjugal relationship between man and God is present. Man is the bride and God is considered to be the bridegroom. All the Christian saints dress in black like the widows of Christ.

There was a devotee from Munger who migrated to Vrindavan and started the Sati Sampradaya there. He was an inspector of schools and whenever he had inspection duty, he had to visit the school according to the schedule and sign the report in the register. However, by nature he was drawn to saintly people and lovers of God. He used to welcome all sadhus, wash their feet, feed them, serve them and offer whatever money he could to them. Once he

became so engrossed in his hospitality to a visiting saint that he lost track of time. Instead of reporting for duty at ten a.m., he visited the school at four p.m. and discovered to his amazement that the register already bore his signature. The peon then told him how he had already come for inspection on schedule and completed his work. This miracle brought about in him an instant change of heart. He thought to himself, "If God can keep an eye on me and do my inspection for me, can he not fend for me too? Can he not give me my daily bread?" That very instant he left home for good and headed for Vrindavan, where he began to live like God's bride.

The transformation of desire is a very important topic. The shastras, classical texts and modern psychology all affirm that desire and passion cannot and should not be killed. Freud has said in unequivocal terms that the suppression of desires and natural instincts leads to mental sickness and neurosis. Suppression and repression are the cause of all diseases. Modern western civilization has grown out of this Freudian theory. Therefore, desire has to be redirected and rechannelled in order to achieve the highest goal of life.

Satsang 2

November 25, 1997, Morning

Have your teachings changed? Aren't you teaching yoga any more?

Frankly speaking, yoga is not my subject. My subject is Vedanta. When I was in Rishikesh I did not even know about asana and pranayama, not to speak of neti, dhauti and basti. That was beyond my comprehension. The area of my study was Advaita Vedanta, the commentaries of Shankara, the commentary of Ramanuja on the *Bhagavad Gita*, the Upanishads and the Brahma Sutras. I was always thinking about *paramatma*, the supreme soul, *jivatma*, the individual soul, *nyaya*, logic, *avidya*, ignorance, and so on. This is the subject matter of the Vedanta of Shankara. My studies were done through the medium of Sanskrit, not Hindi or English. Even now, I speak Sanskrit much better than any other language; it is my mother tongue. But my guru said that I had to teach yoga, so I said, "All right, I'll teach it."

However, I had two problems: first, I did not know yoga and, second, I had no constituency. When you teach something, you should have a constituency, people who will listen, support, patronize and invite you. I had nobody and I was a most unimpressive fellow. From 1956 to 1963 I wandered around India, Afghanistan, Burma, Nepal and Tibet like a vagabond. I used to beg for *bhiksha*, alms, and often spent days without food. I travelled the length and

breath of the Asian sub-continent, sometimes by train, sometimes on foot, even by elephant. I crossed the whole of Burma on the back of an elephant. I went to Afghanistan on foot and by donkey.

Repayment of debt to guru

By 1963 I felt completely broken. I was sure that I had lost and could do nothing more. So, I went to Trayambakeshwar, near Nasik, in Maharashtra, the seat of my ishta devata, Lord Shiva in the form of Mrityunjaya. I am a devotee of Mrityunjaya. I spoke to him just as I am speaking to you, saying, "I feel defeated. The only hope now is for you to work through me. I owe a debt to my guru and I have to clear it." Every disciple who lives with a guru will leave that institute, ashram or gurukul one day, and after going out they will have to repay their debt. Swami Sivananda did not ask me for money. He asked me to repay my debt by teaching yoga and making it popular all over the world. He had faith in me, but I could not do anything.

So, I spoke to Lord Shiva and said, "Work with me for twenty years and when that time is over I will renounce everything," and he fulfilled my request. After that, wherever I went I spoke with authority, not as an illiterate sannyasin. Whatever I wrote in the books about yoga was according to the classical texts and it was absolutely scientific. That all happened because he was speaking, writing and teaching through me. So, the question that I have changed my teachings does not arise because I have never taught! He was teaching through me. If I had studied the texts on hatha yoga, like *Gorakhsha Samhita* or *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, and had known something about asana and pranayama, then you could say, "Why are you teaching this now, when you were teaching something else before?"

You will be surprised to know that I have never practised asana or pranayama. When I read my own books now, I am surprised at the clarity with which I spoke on a subject that I knew nothing about. I have all the books printed in Munger.

One day I was reading one of them and was simply amazed at what I had said about shakti and nadis. How did I know all those things? Where did the knowledge come from? I have never studied it. I have read all my books and, frankly speaking, I appreciate what is written in them, but remember I did not write it, because what is written in them I did not know.

Lord Shiva, who is also known as Bholenath, is pleased when you pray to him like an innocent child. A boy of ten years saw another child playing with a toy. He wanted it and asked his schoolmaster, "Where can I get that toy from?" The schoolmaster said, "Write to God and ask him for it." So the boy wrote a letter, saying, "Dear God, please send me some toys." Then he put it into an envelope, stuck an Indian postage stamp on it and addressed it to, 'God c/o Everywhere'. The boy posted the letter and he received the toys because he was innocent. But if you write a letter and drop it into the post after hearing this story, you won't get the same result because you are not innocent. You have to become childlike, you have to behave like a child.

Perform selfless actions

So, I have never taught yoga. Whatever I taught, it was God teaching through me. Now if my teachings have undergone a change, he is doing it. He is working through me. What are my teachings now? I just teach one thing – practise sat karma. *Sat* means 'truth' and *karma* means 'action'. *Sat karma* is dharma; do good acts and earn divine merits. What is good karma? When you serve your husband, wife and children it is karma, not good karma. If you feed the hungry or help a poor person, that is sat karma, selfless or divine karma. Sat karma is any act you do that helps somebody physically, mentally, spiritually, monetarily or in any other way. That is the teaching which is coming up now through me. I have not made any changes in my thinking.

I came to Rikhia in 1989. On 14th January 1990 I made a sankalpa to repeat my mantra one hundred and eight

crore (10,800,000) times. It took me three hundred days to complete the mantra at the rate of ten hours per day. During that period I practised japa all day. Towards the end I heard him tell me, "Love thy neighbour." He said something like, "As I have given you the comforts of life, so shall you give the same to your neighbours. I have given you a place to live and food to eat, so you will do the same for your neighbours." This was a clear mandate. When I came out of those three hundred days, Swami Satsangi and Swami Vedananda also had similar experiences. They both said, "We want to do something for the people here." I said, "Yes, he has spoken to you also but you did not hear it, you thought it. He came into your thoughts and he came into my ears."

My guru, Swami Sivananda, always emphasized that service is the stepping stone to spiritual life. He used to say, "Serve, love and give." So I have not made any change in the teachings and what shape they will take in the future I do not know. Now the plight of widows has come into the focus of my mind. From next year, 1998, we will be helping the widows of this area. Whatever I have, whatever I can manage, I will consecrate to them during my lifetime and even after that. This is a trial project that will improve the area. In the course of time I can see very clearly that thousands of young, brilliant, fresh, enthusiastic, energetic boys and girls will take up this work throughout the rural sectors of India. They will go to each village and live and work with the village people for their upliftment.

It is very important to protect the natural culture of this country. I can clearly see a new type of sannyasin, who will be free from selfishness and personal ambitions, whose main thought will be how to help others. Helping others is praying to God; living amongst the poor and needy is living with God. Your family and children are spread all over the world. They are all your brothers and sisters. Try to enlarge the scope of your family and get out of that little cage of husband, wife and children – "we two and our two". Why not say, "Husband, wife, children and other children?" That is

atmabhava, feeling yourself in others, and by developing this feeling, the possibility of enlightenment becomes greater.

My passion is helping others

Now I am seventy-five and I have been working in spiritual life since the age of eighteen. I started my spiritual career with tantric practices, then spent twelve years with my guru, twelve years as a vagabond, twenty years at Bihar School of Yoga, and now I am here in Rikhia. During all these years the only inner enlightenment I received was what I read in books. I never had it because I am always thinking, “How can I help this family? How can I help that man? How can I help that little girl who is suffering from polio or arthritis?” These ideas come to me all the time, even in dreams.

Only last night I was dreaming of a lady here whose husband is very sick. I gave him a cycle rickshaw, but he cannot ride it now. She is young, maybe thirty-five, and has two children. So, I was thinking of how to help her, because you cannot help people by just giving money. In the dream I saw that she was approaching an officer, and so I knew she would somehow get a job in a government department, earning maybe two thousand rupees a month, which would be enough for her family to live on.

Now, do you call such thoughts worldly or spiritual? I was thinking of that girl yesterday and talking to somebody about how to find her a job so that she can have regular earnings and feed her children. I am not talking about yoga now, I am talking about bread and butter. How will she get it? We built a house for her last year. I called Surya, a mason from Italy, along with some other swamis, and they built the house nearby. I am looking after her welfare, but I do not give her money. I will see that she gets some work, or a shop, so that she can be independent. The ideas that often come to my mind now about helping others never used to come before, because I was very selfish. I always thought about God and samadhi: *savikalpa samadhi*, *nirvikalpa samadhi*, *ritambhara prajna*, cosmic experience. All those things came to my

mind, but now helping others has become my obsession, my passion.

So, every year on the 8th of September, which is the birthday of my guru Swami Sivananda, I pick out somebody and open a shop for him. It is just an ordinary shop, selling sweets, biscuits, chocolates, pens and pencils, little things involving an expenditure of five to six thousand rupees. I opened such a shop for Lakshman Mody, who is an invalid. Only a few days ago I met him with his daughters and enquired, "How are you doing?" He said, "Swamiji, I am doing very well." I said, "I am very happy." That night I had a very good sleep. Oh, I always have a good sleep, but that sleep was special because that man's agonies were released from my thoughts. The next day a tricycle arrived from Rajnandgaon, so I called him and said, "I have a tricycle for you. Now you will be able to purchase all your provisions from Deoghar without any problems." So, that man is now out of my mind. It seems that some karmas of agony and adversity are lurking there, but those troublesome karmas are all coming out.

Now, you may say that this way of thinking is worldly, but I feel that it is spiritual because mankind is one of God's manifest forms. The whole world is God's manifest form. God is defined as *nirakara* and *nirguna*. He has no name, no caste, no home, but is this the complete definition of God? Is God only *nirakara*? No. God is *sakara* and *nirakara*, with form and without form. This manifest universe, this manifest world, you, me and others, are all forms of God.

Therefore, when you are serving, helping, feeding, assisting, supporting, sympathizing and expressing compassion for others, you are actually doing something for God. There is no question of social service; this is spiritual service. God is in all the faces of those who are suffering, hungry, sick and ignored by destiny and fortune. I will be happy if you can feel love and compassion for these faces, if you can think about everyone who is less fortunate than yourself. Of course, it will be very difficult. The brain is too small and does not have an adequate programming facility.

Why have you chosen Sita's marriage as the theme of this darshan?

Frankly speaking, I have always had intimate feelings for women, and Sita is a woman. She is a female and she is a lady. I don't say the marriage of Rama, I say the marriage of Sita. The idea of Sita's marriage came sometime at the beginning of this year. For the last three or four years, I have been giving dowry gifts to the young brides from my area. In India most girls are married at a very early age. After the customary visit to their husband's house, they remain in their father's home for a few more years until they reach the age of fifteen. At that time they are given a final farewell and sent to live in their husband's house. It is a special ceremony called *dwiragaman*. That is when the bride enters her husband's house for the second time. Until then she is married, but for all practical purposes she is not yet a wife.

At the time of *dwiragaman* I give gifts to the young brides of this area. These gifts are called *solah sringara* and have been traditionally described as the sixteen items required to beautify the bride. Initially I gave these gifts to a few. Then more gifts came and now we are giving them to over three hundred girls at a time. To give such precious gifts to so many girls is not a joke. One piece of jewellery that is compulsory for all married women in India is the mangalasutra. All these women are wearing it. *Sutra* means 'thread' and *mangala* means 'auspicious'. All married women in India must have that auspicious thread. It is the symbol of a married woman in India. The mangalasutra is made of gold and some are inlaid with diamonds, pearls and many precious stones. To give such gifts to five or ten girls is one thing, but when the number of girls went up to three hundred, I had to think about how to manage it.

Parental obligation

In the month of January a bright idea came – "Sita's marriage." If I conduct Sita's marriage on the 4th of December, I will definitely get lots of things because a girl's marriage

is the obsession of every Indian family. The most important obligation of every parent is to see that their daughter is married at the right time, not at the age of twenty-five, thirty-five or forty-five, but at the age of fifteen or sixteen, when she becomes a woman. The menstrual cycle starts around the age of twelve or thirteen and stabilizes at fifteen. The girl should then be married because her feminine psychology must get support from the thought, "Yes, I am married." So, a girl's marriage is most important.

I received many things. Raipur brought about one hundred and fifty sets of *solah sringara*. Calcutta sent about one hundred sets. The Akhara is full; there is no space anywhere. We have bought suitcases and packed them with wedding gifts. Whenever Swami Niranjan or Swami Satsangi come to me, the first questions I ask are, "Have you put the labels on the suitcases? Have you checked the jewellery? Is it real or artificial? Is the sari of good quality? Have you opened the sari? Is there any defect in it?" I am as concerned about the whole affair as if all these girls were my own daughters. I must think that each girl is my daughter or my sister but, of course, not my mother.

Then some devotees from Orissa brought those good luck kits in bags. I hope I am making a clear remark because I will not spare even my swamis. If your daughter or sister is going to her husband's home, will you send her with a bag? She must have a first class suitcase. If she is your sister or daughter, you will give her the best. So, if she is your daughter or sister, can you just give something informal? No. I open and inspect each and every set, and I tell them to add this or change that. Furthermore, when you give a set to the girl you should also give something to her husband, because husband and wife are fifty-fifty. He is Shiva and she is Parvati, he is Gaura and she is Gauri, he is *pingala* and she is *ida*. The woman is one half and the man is the other half.

So, I changed the sixty-five bags for suitcases. I had the suitcases packed, and then I checked everything. In one set there was no cloth for the blouse or petticoat. I had the

jewellery checked by experts. They are busy making sets which include *mangalasutra*, necklace, *nathani*, nose ring, *kangan*, bracelet, and *bichiya*, toe ring. All the village women put on toe rings because they work in the fields. During the paddy season the women stand in water and mud for long hours and the toes have to be separated, otherwise they become rotten.

I organized Sita's marriage in order to inspire all the parents to give at least a few sets. This year, on 4th of December, about six hundred girls will be presented with these sets: three hundred girls who have come to my neighbourhood as daughters in-law, and three hundred girls who are going out to become daughters in-law in other villages. This is the reason why Sita's wedding was organized. The idea came to this creative mind and the work is now close to completion. There are five hundred sets prepared and I need only one hundred more. I will have them by tomorrow evening; there will not be any problems. I have said to Swami Satsangi, "Go to the jewellery shops and purchase all the stock. All the jewellery shops in Deoghar must become empty today."

Training the emotions

This is the emotion of a father, not of a son. It is the father who looks after the marriage of the daughter; it is the brother who looks after the marriage of the sister. This is the emotion of a father or a brother and in this way you are actually training your emotions in the right direction. Only when you train your emotions in the right direction can they be transformed and converted into bhakti, otherwise most of you are totally dissipated. You do not know which way to drive the car. You have a chariot with four horses, one horse goes to the right, another to the left, the third one pulls up and the fourth will not move. Now which way will your chariot go? The untrained senses, mind and emotions all have to be channelled properly.

Sita vivah, the wedding of Sita, will now be conducted every year. It is very popular with the villagers and the

people of this area like it very much. You will see this for yourself on the 4th of December. You should come early, otherwise you won't get a place. All the women in this area are excited. In every house they are talking about this marriage. Not only in my area, but in all the surrounding villages, they are talking about Sita's wedding. They are saying that Swamiji is conducting the marriage, and yesterday I put on my wedding costume. This is the talk of every home because they have never seen me wearing a wrapper; they have only seen me in a loincloth.

Satsang 3

November 25, 1997, Afternoon

Please tell us about your experiences with your guru?

Before coming to my guru, I was greatly impressed by a tantric yogini. I had fifty-one sessions with her and was profoundly affected. I sought to be initiated by her and wanted to become her disciple, but she declined. She told me that she was not my guru and would not give me diksha. Instead I should search for a guru and, so saying, she went away. She was a sannyasini of the Juna Akhara and lived in a small village near Uttarkashi until a few years ago. Her name was Sukhman Giri. Sukhman is a simplified form of the word *sushumna*. The Akhara built on the other side of the road was named Sukhman Marhi after her.

Thus, when she told me to go in search of my guru, I set off. I went to Ahmedabad in Gujarat and stayed at an ashram for fifteen days, but did not like it there. Then I went to Rishikesh and stayed at the Kailash ashram. In those days Swami Vishvadevananda was the Mahaman-
daleshwar there. I asked him to give me sannyasa, but he suggested that I go to Swami Sivananda's ashram nearby. I was an educated boy and that ashram had educated sannyasins living there. In those days Swami Sivananda lived in a very small kutir. When I asked him for sannyasa, he suggested that I should do *seva*, service, and would thereby find my own path automatically. He inspired me

very much and my search for a guru came to an end the moment I met him.

The temperaments of my guru and myself were diametrically opposed. He was like the humble, holy cow, whereas I was like a ferocious Alsatian dog. To this day there is still some vestige of that die-hard habit left in me, but my guru was very calm and serene and I placed all my trust in him. He invariably said that everyone must learn to stand on their own two feet. I believed him because he told me that I should never think of living in the ashram permanently. I would never become a frog in the well.

Guru is the guide

He gave me just one piece of advice, which was to have unshakeable faith in God. He told me not to be ruffled by hope and dejection, not to worry about my talents or the powers I would obtain later. I followed his words with full faith. I never planned to do this or that. I decided to do as he bade me. Everyone is born with a predetermined destiny. We are all pre-programmed and our journey through life follows that program. It is extremely difficult to explain what kind of relationship I had with Swami Sivananda. I think of him very often, but it is not like the way you think of your near and dear ones.

My guru always guided me and put me on the right track. Basically I was a man of the world. I had the temperament of a man who is interested in enjoying life while holding a rifle in one hand. After meeting the tantric yogini I changed my track and became bent on taking sannyasa, but my guru gave me sannyasa only when the time was ripe for me. In 1946 I was sent to Lahore as the resident editor of a magazine. There was a big mercantile press at the Chamberlain Road crossing. I went there to print the magazine and other books of my guru, which I would then send to him in Rishikesh.

In the year 1946 the partition of India took place, but I came to know about it as late as May or June of 1947, when

I was still living in Lahore. At that time I wrote to Swami Sivananda seeking his permission to return to Rishikesh, but he never received the letter and there was no reply. So I got stuck across the newly created border and saw the dawn of 15th August from that side. I need not elaborate on what ghastly sights I witnessed everywhere. If I were to begin to talk about the gore and atrocities inflicted, I would completely lose my faith in dharma. I had the greatest shock and it turned my world topsy-turvy. My outlook on life took a complete turnabout. I became a sceptic and lost faith in God, religion, seers and saints. I saw unbelievable devastation wrought by hatred. I was trapped in Lahore for three days. At long last, on the fourth day the military rescued me by helicopter at the insistence of my guru. This happened in the month of August.

Sannyasa initiation

Swami Sivananda's birthday fell on 8th September and many people had enrolled themselves for sannyasa on that day. My name was also included in the list of sannyasa aspirants, but initially I refused to take sannyasa. Instead I wrote to my friend in Lahore, who was with the *Tribune*, to tell him I was leaving the ashram. He was only too happy at this prospect because I had been a columnist for the *Tribune*. He promptly sent me an advance of four hundred rupees, which was a fortune in those days. I could easily have bought myself a complete set of clothes with that money. I got ready to leave for Lahore but I wanted to remain in Rishikesh for my guru's birthday.

What can I tell you about God's ways? Those were the times when I condemned and criticized sadhus and sages. I denounced religion and dispensed with God. I had seen the way men treated each other, the way women and children were persecuted. I had witnessed women being dishonoured and children massacred mercilessly. I just cannot tell you what I saw on the street corners. Hell could not have been any worse. We cannot expect such ghastly, gory events in the

name of religion and faith. I was sick at heart and thought to myself that if religion was driving people to such an inhuman frenzy, it was better to renounce it altogether. We want religion because it puts us on the path of righteousness, but if religion instigates violence, cruelty and moral degradation, of what use can it be? It is better to abandon it altogether.

On the 9th of September Swami Sivananda called me in and asked me why I had not taken sannyasa. I told him of my plan to leave for Lahore. He asked me what I was going to do there. I told him I would do the same work that I was doing in the ashram, but he brainwashed me. He told me that working selflessly in the ashram with dedication to the guru was not personal karma but karma yoga. He succeeded in convincing me and I told him that I would think again about my plan to leave the ashram. On the 10th of September I was ready with my decision to take sannyasa. By the 11th the preparations were made and on the 12th I took sannyasa. All the others had taken sannyasa on the 8th. I was the only one who followed suit four days later. I took sannyasa on the 12th with all the due formalities and rules. There were acharyas present and havan was performed with all the proper sannyasa diksha rituals.

Spiritual connection

I was in Munger the day Swami Sivananda left his physical body. At midnight I had a vivid vision of my guru bidding me farewell. He told me he was going away. I became completely confused. I could not determine whether what I saw was a dream or reality. The place I saw in the vision was not Munger, it was Rishikesh. I saw myself sitting in a meditative posture on the rock from which I used to dive. I saw Swamiji sitting in a boat which was moving from one bank to the other. There was an accompanying sound of conch, bells and drum. The flywheel of the boat sprayed some water on me as it went past. The water was the blessing for me from my guru.

I remember many things about him, for example, the advice he gave me in 1947 when he gave me sannyasa. I

asked him for some particular sadhana, but he told me not to bother about formal sadhana. Instead he advised me to go on working selflessly for forty years. He told me that my path would reveal itself to me very clearly after forty years. Thus, in 1988, forty years later, I left Munger ashram and found my path. I went to many pilgrimage places that year. I travelled from Kathmandu to Trayambakeshwar. On 14th July 1989 I was sitting in meditation during Chaturmas in Trayambakeshwar and realized that there would be no more keeping of accounts, signing cheques and letters, no more audit reports or writing of books.

That night a deadly storm raged. Lightning flashed, thunder roared and a torrential downpour lashed within me. Suddenly a sonorous voice pronounced, "Twenty-one thousand six hundred." That was the command which came from above. It meant I was to do japa continuously, twenty-four hours a day, fifteen rounds per minute, nine hundred per hour, twenty-one thousand six hundred per day. This means that if I have a satsang with you even for a few hours, my japa falls short by that many hours. Therefore, as soon as the Sita Kalyanam celebration is over, I will retire until we meet next year.

Everything happens according to its own destiny. Everything under the sun is pre-programmed and moves accordingly. No train, no plane, no machine, nothing moves without its own laws and rules. All of us are born after nine months in the womb; this is the law of human birth. At Trayambakeshwar once again I was at the crossroads. Once again I had to make a choice as to where I would go. I had many options to choose from: Gangotri, Rishikesh or Mount Abu, but again, on 8th September, a clear word was heard, 'Chitabhoomi'. So, on 8th September I made the decision to come here to Rikhia.

Thus the relationship between my guru and myself has been one of spiritual communion. It is a spiritual connection, it is not a physical connection. I have had many strange experiences. I have told you of my past experiences, but I have

had some experiences and visions about the future too. I will tell you about these later, in the future, after they come true.

I had experiences in my youth that surface in my life and cause much distress. I have come across many people who have suffered in this way from mental conflicts and are unable to find their path in life. How can I help them?

You are not the only person who has this problem. I think even I share your problem. How can people be helped? Everyone has his own destiny and idiosyncrasies. The best thing you can do to help people is to love them from your heart. As far as helping people mentally is concerned, there is no better panacea than love. Love is the real healing principle. Over the years I have come across many people, some of whom were very close to me. I found them to be very unhappy and full of negative thoughts, even about themselves. I tried to pacify them, advise them, give them good counsel, but nothing worked.

I could always manage those who believed that I liked them or loved them, like Swami Niranjana and some others. But if they began to think that I did not love them, and in truth I did not, it was very difficult to get into their minds. The moment they began to think that I didn't love them, they became very hard nuts to crack. So, in order to help someone, you must first convince that person that you love them. If you are not able to convince them that you love them, nothing is going to work. On the contrary, all your efforts to help will be destroyed by that person. Whatever you do will always be taken in a negative way.

Compassion for all

What is true love? Even if a person talks negatively about you and harms you, still you should love them. Saint Francis has also said this. True love does not mean that you love a person because he loves you. You love a person despite his hatred of you. This love is not just emotional, it has to be concrete. If you don't like me, I don't care, but I will still help you. If your

house is on fire, I will call the fire brigade. I will not say, "Oh, who cares if that rascal's house is burning. Let it burn!"

True love has no conditions at all. Just because you love me, I should love you; this geometry does not work in spiritual life. Saints say, "If you hate me, I love you. If you don't like me, I like you. If you hurt me, I heal you." But this is very difficult because sometimes a person whom I have been helping for years and years suddenly gives me a boxing. I ask, "What are you doing?" He replies, "You rascal." I say, "Hey, I have been feeding and helping you for many years. When you were sick I helped you. When you were poor I gave you money, and now you are calling me a rascal." He answers, "That is all your fraud." Even then, you should not lose your presence of mind, and your love for that person should not change.

Love means sacrifice

Love is most difficult to practise, but hatred is easy. To be false is so natural. Love gives rise to exemplary behaviour in man, while hatred causes obnoxious behaviour. I am not talking of love between a man and woman here, although that is also an act of love, but of that love which is an expression of compassion for all beings. Love has to be defined in a wider perspective. Usually when we speak of love, we think of the feeling between two people, a man and woman. I am the lover and you are the beloved. Love is understood in this perspective, which is incomplete.

The love between a husband and wife, mother and son, brother and sister, friend and friend may be very deep. However, the love between a devotee and God, or a disciple and guru, where two hearts unite, is complete. When two hearts are repulsed by each other, there is hatred. Whenever such feelings come to your mind, you must say, "No, he does not know what he is doing," just as Christ said from the cross, "God forgive them, for they know not what they do." That has to be the attitude.

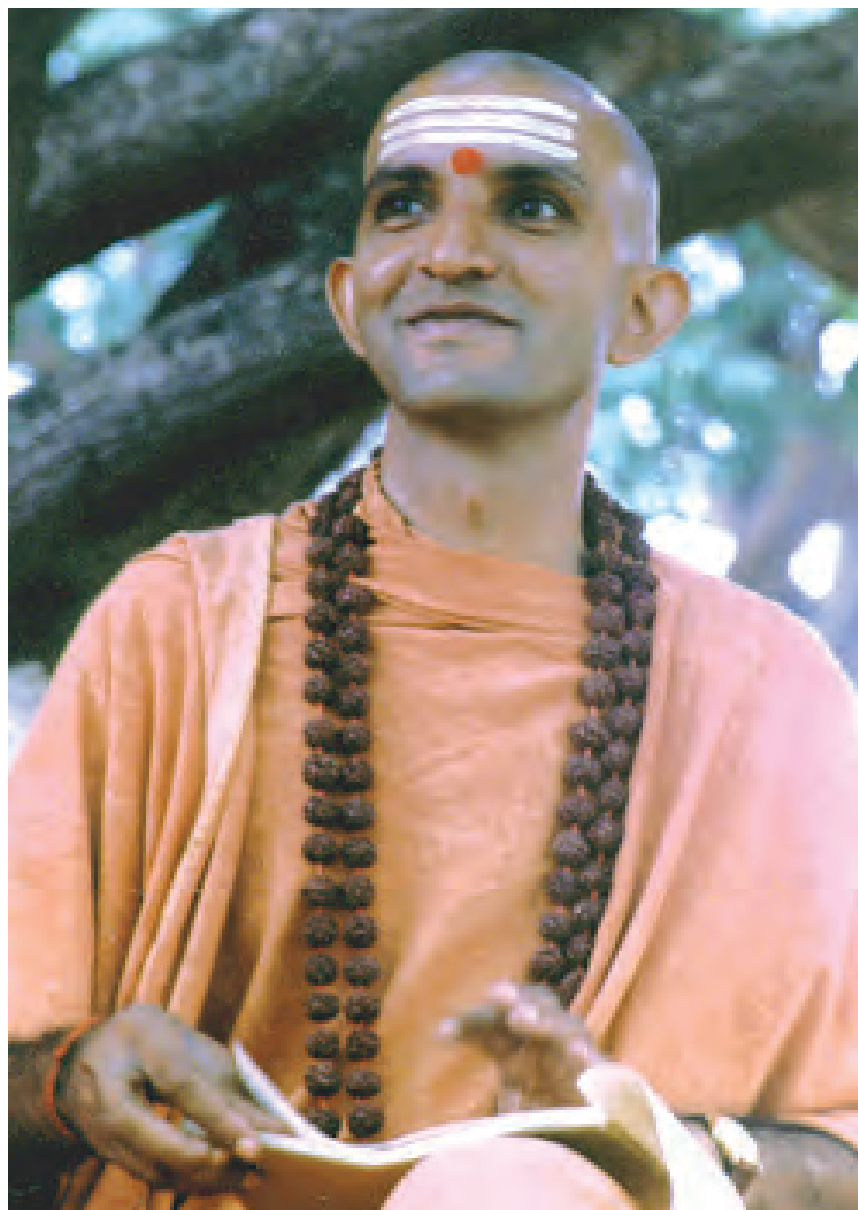
Although you may understand this principle, it is still very difficult to practise. It is so easy to speak of love, but



Sri Swamiji in royal attire



Sri Swamiji and Swami Niranjan during the Lalita Yajna



Swami Niranjan in joyful mood



Meticulous masters of ceremony

what I have said in five minutes may take you lifetimes to achieve. Those who really want to practise love must be prepared to sacrifice as well, because love means sacrifice. Love is giving, not taking. It is an act of unconditional giving and giving and giving, where you may lose yourself, you may even be completely destroyed. Who knows? In the act of love, even if you are a loser it does not matter. But if you only want to be the winner, then it is better not to try because the lover is going to be the loser. True love is giving and not receiving.

Very few people know how to love. True love is the expression of your inner self in the language of purity and effulgence of heart. What Christ, Buddha, Mohammed, Zoroaster and other saints and sages have said about love is not easy to practise. The most difficult thing is to “Love thy neighbour.” You may have experienced your neighbour as your worst enemy. However, the saints were such strong people. They did not say, “Love thy distant neighbour,” they said, “Love thy neighbour,” because they knew that he is the one who always creates problems for you in your neighbourhood, fighting with you and consulting a lawyer over every little thing.

Acts of kindness

Christ and the saints have all said, “Love thy neighbour,” because to love is very difficult. It is difficult because you don’t know how to love; you don’t know the ABC of love. What is love? “You are mine, I am yours?” No, that is not it. You don’t know what love is. Love is an art and a science that you will have to learn. Love is not being emotional and passionate. Saying, “I love you, I love you,” to your beloved does not necessarily mean that you really love him or her. Love is an expression of purity that manifests when you become very strong within your own heart. That is why the saints have always emphasized love. You prepare yourself for love by small acts of kindness. There has to be some elementary training in love. The elementary training, the ABC of love is little acts of kindness.

What are little acts of kindness? Swami Sivananda said, "Bear insult, bear injury, this is the highest sadhana." If you can bear insult and injury, you are a very strong person. Swami Sivananda also said, "Serve, love, give, purify, meditate, realize, be good, do good, be kind, be compassionate." He used to say these ten meaningful words to everyone. He was not a miserly man. Whenever anyone came to ask him for something he would say, "Come on, give it to him." Once he completely cleaned out the whole ashram. We had no blankets because he had given them all away. The first thing he used to say was, "Namo Narayan, are you all right? Do you like chocolate?" The reply would come, "Yes Swamiji, I do like it." So he would say, "Okay Swami Satyananda, give him some chocolate." Then to another he would say, "O Buddhiji, how are you? I have a shirt for you."

Swami Sivananda always used to think about others. Whenever he met people, he did not give spiritual lessons such as I give. He always used to say nice things about people and he would give them clothes, food and medicine for their sickness and disease. He could remember the names of each one of his acquaintances from thirty-five to forty years back. If a man had become old, he would then ask, "How is your grandson? He was in the eighth class. Where is he now? What he is doing? He had a mole here. Is the mole still there?" You should know about the man whom you love. If I love you, I should know everything about you, especially your difficulties, problems, ambitions and desires. If I know nothing about you, if I don't want to know anything about you, then I can't care for you.

So love is a very difficult thing. The philosophy of love and bhakti should be well understood. The day it is understood by the whole of humanity the world will become a place for the gods to visit. All the gods who are supposed to be in heaven will say, "Let us go to this blessed Earth. There is plenty of love there." But today they say, "No, no, no. We don't want to go there. They may pick up my

luggage or purse; they may set off a land mine or I may get shot somewhere.” They don’t say, “Blessed Earth,” they say, “Damned Earth.” So, when mankind learns how to love and serve one another; to be kind and tolerant to one another, to help one another and to share the problems, worries and ideas of others, then your family, your society and the world will be a better place to live in.

Satsang 4

November 26, 1997, Morning

How can we develop love and compassion without being abused or having our individual boundaries infringed upon by other people?

This is a very difficult question to answer, but one thing comes to mind. God is compassionate. He has given us this body and mind. Have we used or misused his compassion? He has given you a sound mind, good intellect, knowledge, beauty, strength and wealth. Do you believe that he has given it to you or not? If you believe that somebody else has given it to you, the question does not arise. But all the scriptures, including the Bible, the Vedas, the Koran and others, unanimously say that God created human beings, as well as everything else, out of love and compassion. So this life that we hold today is God's gift, his *prasad*. He has presented us with a body, mind and spirit out of compassion. He is the ocean of compassion, love, mercy and forbearance. But tell me, how have we used his gift? We have misused all that God has given us in charity, love and compassion.

Now we begin to see that the question is quite simple. Basically, the point is that if you are compassionate, others will misuse it. So let them misuse it! What do you care? After all, you are doing the same thing. How are you different from them? God gave you this body out of compassion and you misused it. You gave something to me out of compassion

and I misused it. I gave something to you out of compassion and you misused it. If abuse is the accepted use of God's gift, why should you worry about misuse of your small gifts? When I give you something, I should not expect a return from it. I love you and, therefore, I give to you. Love is unconditional. This problem has come to your mind because you don't understand the reality. You want to show compassion so that everybody will respect you and think that you are a good person. However, it does not work this way.

Since the beginning of creation man has misused God's gift. Why did God give you this human body? To help others. Why did God give you so much money? To help those who have not. Why did God give you so much strength? To help the weak. But what have you done? You are using everything for yourself. You have created a little world for yourself, consisting of yourself, your wife and your children. This little cage of 'me, my wife and my children' is your world. The world starts with the husband or wife and ends with the child. Others are not included in your family circle. The other five billion people in the world do not belong to your family circle. God did not give you this body so that you may remain confined in a small family. For a man with a divine heart the whole world is his family. Those who say, "She is my wife, he is my husband, he is my son and she is my daughter," have very small minds.

This is exactly the question that I had to confront after coming to Rikhia. A metamorphosis took place in my personality, way of life and destiny. I changed my teaching and my way of thinking. I started distributing prasad at the end of the year to rickshaw drivers, thela drivers, labourers and beggars. My *pooja*, worship, begins from Makar Samkranti, 14th January, to Karka Samkranti, 16th July, when the sun crosses two important points in the heavens. Then until Kartik Poornima I have another program of *pooja* and many people may even laugh at me for this. At the end of that time I offer prasad. I make offerings of two hundred rickshaws, ten thousand dresses, five hundred good luck kits. I make a list of

the items and the recipients and place it before my deity. This distribution of prasad has been going on for many years, but I don't take anything from Bihar School of Yoga. I don't want any institution to be my benefactor. God is my benefactor. If he gives me something, I will give it to you. If he doesn't give me anything, then I won't because he doesn't want me to. If he wants me to give, I will. If he doesn't, I won't. So, I put the prasad before him and in this way we started giving.

Give without expectation

One day, one of the villagers came with a complaint: "Swamiji, you gave a cow to that man and he has sold it." He informed Swami Satsangi and she was in a panic: "Oh, we gave him a cow and he has sold it. He is making fools of us. He thinks that we are idiots." I said, "Just be quiet. Don't press the panic button." You know, this younger generation pushes the panic button very fast. I said, "Don't worry." Swami Satsangi was terribly upset. Her ego was hurt. She thought that she had been made a fool of and that people would consider Swami Satyananda a foolish man. I said, "God has given us so many precious things and we have misused them. God knows it, but what does he think?"

Let me see, God may be sitting somewhere in Italy, Germany, Japan, India or Russia. Maybe he's in heaven, paradise or some loka. God is thinking, and his assistant points out, "You have given so much to this man and look what he is doing there!" God says, "It doesn't matter, he will follow his karma." Because the moment you act, you create a karma and the moment you create a karma, there is an equal and apposite reaction. So to everyone I give prasad to I say, "I am giving this gift to you and you can sell it if you like, I won't mind in the least. If you can get five hundred, five thousand or ten thousand rupees for your evening meal or even for your bottle or for a girl in the night, I don't mind. The gift is yours. God has given it to you and you are responsible for your karma. I will not be responsible for your karma." Now those who were bringing complaints have

stopped coming because they know this swami won't stop giving. He says, "Continue, continue."

After all, I am a gift of God and I have realized this in my life. My speech, my mind, my life are gifts of God. Everything in me – the goodness, the evil, the intelligence, the idiocy, the genius – are all gifts of God. So I will think and behave like him. I can't be God, but I can definitely think about how God thinks. Now the whole trend has changed. One man in a village nearby had quietly sold his cow. It now costs five to ten thousand rupees for one cow with a calf. When that man sold his cow, the whole village turned against him. They said, "If you do not bring back the cow, we are going to excommunicate you from the *panchayat*, the village community. So he had to return the cow. It has become so difficult for the people of this community to misuse my prasad!

The question now arises as to whether my compassion is misused. No, my dharma is simply to love you. Now it is up to you to decide what your dharma is. How can I decide your dharma? How can I say you must love me in return? You never say, "Love me." Is there any such phrase in the world? There is a phrase, "I love you," but I have never heard anyone say, "Love me." Yes, I love you because it is my duty, but whether you love me or hate me or kick me, what you do is your duty. You can say, "I hate you, you are a damned fool!" It's up to you.

How can we confront and face our suffering?

Nobody wants to suffer, but everybody is suffering. Everybody wants happiness, but nobody has it. People are always unhappy. It seems that suffering is the basic law of life, the basic process of evolution. What then is evolution? A plant evolves from a seed, a flower from the plant, a fruit from the flower. Evolution is the progressive unfoldment of the essence of everything. Man has to evolve not physically, but spiritually. So, in spiritual life suffering has to be understood in the light of evolution.

You may have noticed that most of the saints, prophets and avatars had very tragic lives. Christ, Rama and Krishna were very powerful people. They could have avoided tragedy, but they realized that pain is a blessing. For one who wants to become a superman, pain is the crucible or cross. In the words of Swami Sivananda: "Pain is a crucible into which nature throws a man whenever she wishes to mould him into a sublime superman." This applies to Christ, Rama and Krishna.

Rama was born into a royal family, with all its riches, but how was his life spent? For twelve years Rama lived in the ashram of his guru, Vasishtha. There he slept on the floor, tended the cows, cleaned the ashram and worked all day and night just as the swamis do here or anywhere else. When he returned home after twelve years, he was married. That was a very joyful part of his life. After that, he was exiled to the forest for fourteen years. Then Sita was kidnapped by Ravana, and Rama had to organize an army and fight to get her back. When he got Sita back and they both returned to Ayodhya after fourteen years, there were scandals, and ultimately Sita had to be abandoned. Isn't this story that is told in the *Ramayana* a tragedy?

What is the story of Christ's life, if not a tragedy? The life of Sri Krishna was also a tragedy. Before he was even conceived by his mother, he was on the hit list of Kamsa, who was his uncle and the king of Mathura. Throughout his life he was on the run, and in the end he was assassinated. If these great men were avatars, why were their lives filled with tragedy? If Christ was the son of God, why did he have to undergo suffering? Because without suffering nothing improves, nothing grows, nothing evolves, nothing becomes brilliant and illuminating. That is why sannyasins and monks are told that if they have no suffering in their lives, they must impose suffering on themselves. They must live lives of suffering. If you have studied the life of Saint Francis of Assisi, you will know how he suffered.

Many people have been born on this earth, have endured suffering and have thereby risen to greatness. What did

Mahatma Gandhi achieve for India? Without weapons, he brought freedom to this country with dignity, pride and gentleness, but one fine evening an assassin shot him down. Why don't these people avoid tragedies? Because if they were to avoid suffering, they would set us a very bad example. We would also try to avoid suffering. So, if you have no pain in your life, you should impose suffering and poverty on yourself in order to purify your mind.

There are many prophecies about changes that will come on Earth in the next twenty years, bringing devastation and destruction. Would you please speak about such prophecies in the light of your knowledge?

Frankly speaking, I am not a prophet and even if I were I would not say so, because I don't want to be crucified. I feel it is better to go slow and remain unseen and unheard. I just want to carry on with the simple sadhana that I do: pooja every day for ten or eleven months and distribution of useful things to the village people around me at the end of the year, that's all. I don't want to be a prophet. I am a person who has been exposed to reasonable and scientific thinking. I don't see darkness on the horizon; I see better things to come. Of course, individuals will always be unhappy. Many people will commit suicide and do all kinds of funny things as they do now. There will be changes in government, as has always happened throughout history, and many leaders will be killed, as they have been in the past. I don't deny that, but mankind will be in a better position to live a spiritual life.

The spiritual life that we want to live and the answers about spiritual life that we want to understand and discover will be more available to us in the future. Many more gurus and teachers will come. People will have more time to devote to spiritual life. In fact, in the past fifty years we have had more time to read spiritual books. We have more money now to spend on going to satsangs. Previously it took two hours to travel from your village to the city. Some people have flown here from far away England, Slovenia and Australia in just

a few hours. So I am optimistic about the future. I am not a doomsday prophet. You will have very good opportunities in the future and perhaps a day will come when you can fly straight here from your hometown. There might be an airport forty miles from here, who knows?

It is immaterial whether this body goes on living or not. Satyananda has come many times in the past; Satyananda will come many times in the future. Actually, when I first came to Deoghar I tried to make a booking for my ongoing journey, but the reply came, "All the seats are booked." He said, "If you want a one way ticket, we can give you that." I said, "No, I want a two way ticket so I can come back again." He replied, "Two way tickets are not available. They are all booked because everybody is returning."

God created man, then man becomes either virtuous or vicious according to his own deeds and dies. If this is true, then why does God take birth to protect the virtuous by destroying the vicious?

Every day the scavenger comes and cleans your toilet. Why does he come? Because there is a constant conflict going on between clean and dirty. You clean your toilet every day, but still it gets dirty. You clean your kitchen today, but tomorrow it will be dirty again. Similarly, the avatars, saints and sages come to help you clean up your lives, to develop virtue and remove vice. However, virtue and vice need to be understood properly because social virtue and spiritual virtue are two different things.

In the olden days in England or India, a lady who was covered from head to toe was considered to be virtuous. This was a social virtue, but it is not so today. In the past women in India did not go out of doors. It was very hard to touch an Indian lady. Men did not even know what a woman looked like. Four or five hundred years ago, a sultan who was visiting India heard that a particular queen in Rajasthan, called Padmini, was very beautiful. So he said to her husband, "Your wife is said to be very beautiful. I just want to see her."

The husband said, “It’s impossible to see her because she would never show herself.” But then he was the sultan, so what did they do? They brought a mirror and the sultan saw the queen’s face in the mirror. Today Indian girls go out of doors even in the villages, so there are no problems. I can talk to these girls. You can talk to them and shake hands with them. Our ancestors would never have dreamt that a boy and girl would shake hands with each other. So there are social and spiritual virtues. Social virtues change with the times, but spiritual virtues never change.

Can you tell us what ‘sat’ means in relation to sat vichara and sat karma?

My definition of sat is not philosophical; I take it in a positive sense. *Sat* is a Sanskrit word meaning ‘positive’ or ‘real’. I always think of others positively because it helps me. If I think about anyone negatively, it is painful. It creates bad karma in me which changes the chemical secretions in my physical body, and I do not want that. Good or positive thinking about others is called *sat vichara* and is helpful to you. By sat I also mean a karma that will help others or make somebody happy. *Sat karma* is good action which ultimately helps you. Any act done for others, who are helpless, poor and in need, is sat karma. Any act done for yourself or your family is not sat karma. It is just karma because it will produce another karma. Any act you do which harms others is *asat karma*, negative karma. So we have negative karma, neutral karma and positive karma. Positive karma will erase your other karma.

I have always had a great weakness for women. From childhood I have been obsessed by their plight because within our society women are a helpless lot, and I don’t like this situation. I feel that women must be allowed to live as freely as men, and have always spoken openly about it. I have given women the maximum possible patronage, even in the institutional affairs of ashram life. Although not everybody responded well to this idea, I didn’t care

and gave women every possible opportunity. Even today, I always tell the villagers that women should be allowed to live as freely as men. This seems to be my karma. I've realized it, so what do I do? I've made it clear that all the girls in my neighbourhood must be helped through education and marriage. Of course, if they want to take sannyasa, well and good, but not everybody should take sannyasa.

When you perform an act, you are creating another karma, but when you perform sat karma, you are erasing or reducing your karma. Your karma becomes more and more rarefied and purified.

When dealing with matters pertaining to one's work in the organization, the organizational course of action may actually be contradictory to the course of action one might take as a sannyasin. For example, the sannyasa attitude may require waiting patiently whereas the organizational attitude may require a certain action. How can we choose the right course of action to take so that these attitudes are not in conflict with each other?

When a sannyasin is looking after an institution, he should behave like the office bearer of the institution, not like a sannyasin. I am not only referring to yoga institutions. The army, the government, the police force, the judiciary, even parliament are all institutions. If any respected sannyasin here becomes the chief justice and a man comes before him accused of murder, will he pardon him? Even though he is a sannyasin, he will have to act as per the laws of the judiciary. A sannyasin is a spiritual personality, but when he looks after an institution he has to behave as the office bearer, secretary, president, treasurer or whatever. He should not be confused, although many people do confuse the two, even in this institution. Of course, he should act with wisdom and proper understanding. He should not behave unwisely or with ego. He should not punish anyone just because he hates him.

Institutions are the basis of a society and a nation. They cannot function without a proper system. There are private

institutions such as yoga institutes or institutes for arts and crafts, and also public institutions such as the judiciary, police, army and government. Suppose you are an office bearer in the government, will you express your individuality there? You may be a Hindu, a Muslim, a Christian or a renunciate; that is your personal affair. As long as you are a member of any institution, you will have to function according to its norms. If you do not understand the system of an institution and do not want to follow it, you can resign, but you cannot change the system according to your own personal beliefs. Institutions are changed by social evolution, not by individual whims. When society and humanity evolve, social changes take place and then the institution changes.

In ancient days, the judiciary and the laws of justice were different because society was not as it is today. Once upon a time, the king or emperor used to pronounce judgement, but today the president or the prime minister of a country cannot pronounce judgement because society has decided that the judiciary must run in a certain way. Parliament cannot interfere with the judiciary and executives cannot interfere with parliament because they are different institutions. I had great difficulty getting this point across in my institutional life at Bihar School of Yoga and at Rishikesh as well. I have always said that one should get up early in the morning and do one's duty. If he cannot do it, let him leave and find some other comfortable institution. There have to be rules and a code of conduct in order to maintain any system.

Is it possible to change one's destiny? How is karma linked with destiny?

Today, in the evening of my life, as I look back over my seventy-five or so years, I have come to one conclusion. Off and on I reflect very critically and systematically on everything that has happened in my life. I will not rule out personal will, but I think destiny is more powerful. Destiny is the deciding factor, rather than personal will and effort. When you sow a seed and look after it well, what is

the deciding factor in the success of its growth – the seed, the soil or the care? If you say, “My care,” give it without the seed. The important and deciding factor is destiny. In the seed of a cucumber or carrot lies its destiny. The seed is the storehouse of destiny. It will bring wheat, carrots or cauliflowers. When you look after it, putting it in the right soil and giving it proper water, that is called *purushartha*, personal effort. But personal effort will not produce a cauliflower! Only the seed of a cauliflower will produce a cauliflower. Remember that.

Everyone is bound by his or her destiny, and you can see this everywhere. I am different from you and you are different from everyone else. Nobody is alike. That is destiny. Destiny is *prarabdha*, karma that has come from the past. If I have a cauliflower seed in my palm, do I have to prove that this seed also existed in the past? No, and if you ask for proof that this cauliflower seed had a past, I will say you are an idiot! Similarly, the very presence of karma and the fact that we exist proves that we have a past. I am not the beginning and I am not the end. I am a link in this long chain of events which is due to the law of cause and effect. The law of cause and effect has no beginning and no end. Destiny relates not merely to the body or to happiness and unhappiness. Everything in this universe has a destiny somewhere, but this concept is very difficult to explain and to understand.

For many years when I was studying Vedanta and Samkhya in the original texts, I would get confused. I would think about what the past of matter must have been and then I would try to link it up with scientific thought. For years and years I thought about what cause and effect and destiny were, but today, I can tell you very definitely that destiny is the ultimate factor in man’s life, and to change destiny is difficult. To change the quality of your life is easy. If you attend satsang and do some yoga practices, you can change the quality of your life, speech, thinking and behaviour. You can change it all, but you cannot change the quality of your personality. How to change the *jivatma*, the personality, has

been a subject of discussion in this country for centuries. I can change you from a rascal to a saint. I can change you from a bad person to a good person. I can teach you Hindi, Sanskrit, Italian or German, but there is a personality in you that has its own idiosyncrasies.

Only perfect vairagya can alter destiny

There is a jiva, an id, in you, which has its own ignorance, its own darkness. Some call it purusha, personality, man. It has many names, and it is that jiva which you call light or life. You may call it by any name, but there is something other than the body, other than the mind and senses. There is something other than what you can see, understand and appreciate. That is called jivatma. It is that jivatma or soul which leaves the body. That soul which leaves the body at the time of death is full of desires, even if it is the soul of a sannyasin, of Swami Satyananda or anybody else. Even Christ had desires; he wanted to make everybody happy. I have a desire; I want to help everybody. That is also a desire. To harm somebody is a desire and to help somebody is also a desire. The soul has desires, passions, emotions, and the totality of this is called karma. The totality of what one carries from here is called karma, and that karma is in a very microscopic form.

Now, how can that karma, that destiny be managed? For centuries it was said in the Vedas, Upanishads and Puranas that there is one thing which can change man's destiny. Complete vairagya can alter man's destiny. These texts did not say *tyaga*, which means renunciation. All monks renounce their father, mother, brothers and sisters, but that is not vairagya. The definition of vairagya is given very clearly in Patanjali's *Yoga Suktas*. Vairagya is easy to understand. When you hear about it, you will be very optimistic, but when you try to practise it, you will say, "Oh my God, it is more difficult than I thought." The original sutra is *Drishtaanushravika vishayaavitrishnasya vasheekaara sanjna vairaagyam* (1:15), which means, "When an individual becomes free of cravings for the sense objects which he has experienced, as well as

those of which he has heard, that state of consciousness is vairagya.”

Can you completely forget the sense experiences you have seen, heard or experienced in the past? You have had many experiences in the past which you are not able to disconnect from. There is no cut off point. Today is connected with yesterday. The present is connected with the past and the past with the future. So, the past, present and future are confused. You should be able to isolate them, but you don't understand them in isolation. You only understand them linked with each other. *Raga* or attraction is an attitude through which you are always aware of past experience. Many sannyasins are still linked with their past, even after sannyasa. They can't exist in the present. They can't look into the future. They have relationships with their past whether they are thoughts, habits or family members. However, if there is perfect vairagya, destiny can be erased.

Example of Rama

If you want to understand what vairagya is, you should read *Yoga Vasishtha*. Vasishtha was the guru of Sri Rama, and he stayed with him for twelve years. After receiving his education at Vasishtha's ashram, Rama returned to his father's kingdom, but his mind was full of vairagya even after his return to the luxury and comforts of the palace. He wanted to renounce the pleasures that appeared transient and take sannyasa, which in a way he ultimately did. Although he was the son of an emperor, due to this state of mind he did not attend to the court or to his duties.

One day, seeing his inclination towards renunciation, his father came to his room and asked, “What has happened to you, Rama? You are always sitting alone and appear depressed. What is this mood which assails you?” Rama replied, “Father, why should I worry about the empire, wife or children? Everything is unreal, everything is a dream, everything is transitory. Therefore, I do not wish to dwell on these things, instead I would like to devote my time to

contemplation of *parabrahman*, the supreme.” The king exclaimed, “ My God, something has gone wrong with my son’s brain! After such a long time, in my old age I was blessed with a son and he is thinking of taking sannyasa!”

Rama’s state of mind alarmed his father very much, so he went to Vasishtha and asked him to deal with Rama in such a way that he would once again regain an interest in the temporal world. After all, he was the heir to the throne and vairagya or dispassion at such a young age would prevent him from attending to his duties. So Vasishtha visited the palace and asked Rama what was in his mind. Rama said, “Gurudev, I do not like anything in this world. Everything seems to be a fleeting dream. All these people will die one day.” This is fatalism, a pessimistic philosophy.

Then Vasishtha replied, “Rama, as far as dispassion is concerned you are perfectly right, but the way you are looking at the things of the world is not correct.” Then followed a lengthy and interesting discourse between the guru and his disciple, which is the subject of the *Yoga Vasishtha*. Ultimately, Rama was convinced that, although the world is fleeting and one must have dispassion for it, still one must attend to the dharma or duty before one.

I am explaining this because you ought to think about what your perception of the things you have known and enjoyed in life will be after the birth of vairagya. How will you perceive your wife, children and family, your money, profession and yourself, after developing dispassion, vairagya, and the spirit of renunciation? Will you become a lunatic? Will you speak the way that Rama spoke to his father: “Why should I work? You are going to die tomorrow. I will also die. Everybody is dying; nobody is immortal. The whole world will go to the graveyard, so why work?” No, a vairagi, sannyasin, monk, mahatma or saint has a very optimistic perception of life. If you can just cut off the past and live in the present, then life becomes beautiful. The children are good, the profession is fine, my guru is all right. Everything becomes beautiful – *Satyam Shivam Sundaram*.

So, Vasishtha instructed Sri Rama on how he should function as a king and emperor, but although Rama was a monarch, we also consider him to be a sannyasin. He was the son of an emperor and had a wife, but he was like a sannyasin, perfect in karma, strong in mind, sweet in speech, tender in body. If you like, you may read the Bible or the *Ramayana*. What difference does it make? You may use the terms water or *pani*, soap or *sabun*, but the substance is the same. Similarly you may call God by any name. What we are trying to convey through all the names is God, who has neither name nor form. He assumes any form or name and comes into this world for the sake of his devotees and bhaktas.

Satsang 5

November 26, 1997, Afternoon

I am a loner, a recluse, but I have noticed one predominant principle in my life. I am a vehicle, a chariot, and God is the charioteer. I am a machine and he is the machine operator. God resides within me and works through me in such a way that I do what is called social service. God may choose to make me work for myself, for my own selfish purpose wherein no benefit accrues to others through me. If so, even that is fine. After all, am I free? Am I self-willed? You created me and I was born. I had no plan of my own. Neither my father nor my mother had a plan. I do not move by my own choice. I may claim that I do this or that, but it is only my ego that speaks thus. *Ishvaro aham*: “I am God.” *Bhogi siddho aham balvan*: “I am the enjoyer and I am strong.” Who is there like me? I am unique. I am still young. If I spoke like this, and I might have, that was only my ignorance speaking.

The jnani speaks the language of a bhakta, a devotee. He says, “You work through me. I go according to your wishes. Thy will be done.” The world says, “I am doing it,” but the jnani says, “God makes me do everything.” If he leads me to hell or to knowledge of Brahman, it is fine with me because I am not free. I have no will of my own. O God, when you gave me good sense, I did a lot of good work. When you gave me vice, I abducted Sita. When you inspired me to take sannyasa, I took sannyasa. When you prompted me to give

up sannyasa, I gave up sannyasa. I am not at all free. Are any of you free? In fact, who is free in this creation? You may consider yourselves to be free, but you are not.

Spiritual life begins with seva

Now let us talk about social service. I am doing whatever is asked of me. There is nothing personal in it from my side. Had it been a matter of personal choice, I would have started social service way back, forty years ago, in the ashram of Swami Sivananda. Swami Sivananda's fundamental philosophy of life was social service, human service. He used to place *Bhagvat bhajan*, singing God's name, at the bottom of the priority list. His priorities were "Serve, love, give, purify, meditate, realize." So, meditation was at the end of his list, a long way off. Whereas you start your spiritual life with meditation, my guru's spiritual life started with service and culminated in meditation. The beginning of spiritual life stems from service to humanity.

In Rishikesh, I had ample scope and opportunities for *seva*, service. Swami Sivananda used to call in the sweepers and scavengers, wash their feet and feed them. My response to that was negative. I found it useless and irrelevant for spiritual evolution. However, being his disciple I did render service. I cleaned, cooked and fed the scavengers, but my heart was not in it. There were many lepers in Rishikesh lined up along the roads and pathways. Once Swamiji thought of settling them in proper housing. He was given some land by Tehri Maharaj where some houses were built for the lepers. He gave each one a goat and also bundles of bidis, and told them not to go begging in the streets.

I was given the duty of going amidst the lepers and the sick to read and teach them the *Ramacharitamanas* and *Ramayana*, but my heart was not in the work. I used to accompany the doctors and distribute drugs and medicines among the lepers. I performed all the duties but not from my heart. However, when God inspires you to do service, you take it as his blessing. The work and service that are being

carried out here are not discharged as social service, but in compliance with God's will, in obedience to his command. This is the fulfilment of his wish; he tells me what to do and I obey. Last year he said to me, "There are many helpless widows in your neighbourhood. What have you thought of for them?" I said, "What can I think of? You tell me and I will carry it out."

Employment for widows

In the coming year, from Makar Samkranti I will have the poor widows seated in the hall in which you were singing kirtan this morning. I will tell the illiterate ones to chant the Maha mantra for eight hours and then give them wages at the end of the day for their day's work of chanting. Those who are literate will be given a note book in which to write the name of Rama till the end of the day. I will collect all those note books and keep them. Whenever you plan to build a house, you can take a few of them from me and put them in the foundations. Those widows who are educated will be given the *Ramacharitamanas* to read. They will be given a separate room in which there will be a picture of Lord Rama. There will be provision for all three classes of widows: illiterate, literate and educated.

This year we have built a home for the widows. It is called Tapovanam because widows are also a kind of *tapasvini* or ascetic. Our greatest tapasvinis have been widows. Who is better at austerities than they? Those women who become widows are asked to give up coloured clothes and are permitted to wear only white. They are not supposed to wear jewellery of gold or silver. They are banned from auspicious ceremonies and weddings. They are not allowed to meet men. You people have laid down many rules for widows in the name of the shastras. I cannot break these rules, neither did I want to, because it is your society and social code, not mine. But here, they will be given wages for their daily labour of chanting, writing and reading God's name. This year we have made a budget for one hundred widows.

Prasad distribution

When God gives the order, his servant works for him. In this way it should be understood that I am not serving society but obeying God. What is being distributed at this program is not donation, it is prasad. What does prasad mean? *Prasad* means happiness, delight and joy. *Vishad* means unhappiness, dejection and despair. Both prasad and vishad are Sanskrit words. What we get in the temples is prasad because we are very glad to receive it. We are glad because we desire the gifts of the gods and goddesses. Similarly, these rickshaw and thela pullers are very happy to receive gifts from Sri Rama.

On Kartik Poornima, when both of my anushtanas are over, I offer prasad to the Lord. That prasad is neither fruits nor sweets, bel leaves nor tulsi leaves. It will be ten thousand items of clothing for women, children and men, rickshaws and thelas for the strong young men and auto-rickshaws for the educated men. Marga Sheersha is the best month of the year and we choose it for distributing the prasad. This auspicious month has just started and over the last three or four days we have already started distributing prasad of clothes from village to village. Those who wish to can accompany the swamis for the distribution.

The swamis visit the villages to survey and assess the villagers' requirements. They give clothes, sweaters, toys, slates, comics like *Amar Chitrakatha*, pencils, rubbers and sharpeners to the children. This is not prasad from Swami Satyananda, it is prasad from Sri Rama. We do not merely offer sweets, flowers and incense as prasad. We prefer to offer something that will be useful to the whole family in the long run. Almost all the rickshaws in Deoghar bear the inscription 'Presented by Sivananda Math'. In Kali yuga neither yoga nor yajna nor tapasya works. There are only two paths for achieving one's ultimate goal: one is God's name, *naam*, and the other is giving, *daan*.

Now I have started giving Walkmans as well. The boys and girls ask me what they should listen to. I tell them it is up to them, whatever they like. One day when Tripura was

wearing earphones at the building site, a villager thought it was a hearing aid. It was then I realized that if children in the cities can have personal tape recorders to listen to music, why not the children from the villages? This year is the golden jubilee of Indian independence, so giving the village children this gift is expected of us.

Seventy percent of India is totally ignored and I make this statement on the golden jubilee celebration of your freedom and independence. These people live only by the name of God, only God sustains them. They enjoy no amenities, no privileges from the nation. This nation has not given them even drinking water. The nation has given them no facilities whatsoever. Whatever funds the nation spends are directed towards big cities like Delhi, Bombay, Bangalore and Kanpur. No money comes into the villages. Not that I am complaining. I keep asking God thus, "God why have you forgotten these innocent, pious, clean-hearted, poor villagers? They are foremost in discharging their religious duties, foremost in manual labour and you have forgotten them?" Therefore, it is not social service that I am doing for them, it is prasad distribution.

Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva are described as the trinity. Saraswati, Lakshmi and Parvati are their respective better halves. In tantra, Shakti occupies the prominent position, releasing all the devatas from catastrophes and crises. Are Shakti and Shiva or purusha and prakriti just theoretical differentiations? In practice is there no difference between the two?

This is a very heavy question. It will give everybody a headache. Keep some aspirin handy. I will not give you a straight answer because you would go off to sleep. The person who has put this question seems to be rather dull. Paramatma is the witness and Shakti is the doer. Paramatma lives all by himself. Think of him as a loner, unattended, unaccompanied by anyone. He has no attributes, no form. Call him unattached. He has neither form nor name nor

place. He is omnipresent. He is shoonya. He is beyond the mind, intellect and senses; beyond the sun and the moon. No one can reach him.

However, the Upanishads tell us that once paramatma became very bored. The Upanishads quote him thus: *Ekoham bahusyam* – “I am all alone, let me be many.” Then he took refuge in prakriti. *Prakriti svamadhisthaya*. Prakriti became his support, his aide. With her help God took birth and form; he assumed a body. Shakti is matter and Shiva is consciousness, whether it is the duo of Brahma and Saraswati, Vishnu and Lakshmi or Shiva and Parvati. When they unite, matter becomes conscious and kinetic. God incarnates in a visible form with the help of prakriti, then he takes up a visible form and attributes, he becomes *sakara* and *saguna*. Once he does that, he subjects himself to the laws of prakriti. What are the laws of prakriti? Birth and death, happiness and sorrow, all these pairs of contrasts apply to the incarnation.

In tantra, the seat of Shakti is supposed to be mooladhara chakra and the seat of purusha is sahasrara. But where do they unite, in sahasrara or mooladhara? They unite in sahasrara. For that fusion to take place Shakti has to be awakened by sadhana. That sadhana is called tantra. There is Shaiva sadhana and also Vaishnava sadhana. You may have heard about Shaiva tantra in which there are a number of sadhanas.

When my mother sits for meditation in front of her deity or the picture of her guru, negative thoughts assail her. What can she do to free herself from this?

When you take a purgative there is diarrhoea. In the same way, when you meditate on God, your chosen deity or the guru, all the impurities of the mind well up. Let them come up. There is no need to do anything about them. You should neither suppress nor get carried away by bad thoughts. These bad thoughts are the rubbish within your own mind. Bad feelings surface, taking refuge in the guru. When you take a laxative, it is not the medicine that comes out, it is the

garbage inside that is thrown out. Your intestines are not thrown out, only the accumulated dirt passes out. Similarly, when you begin your sadhana all the negativity comes out. It happens to one and all. The mind tends to wander all the more during the sadhana hour. It becomes more fickle; it wavers all the more. People think that because they cannot stabilize their minds through sadhana, no purpose is being served. So they give up their sadhana in desperation.

Secondly, remember that in order to enhance shraddha or faith, three supports are used. The first is the mother, the second is the gods and goddesses, and the third is the guru. Let us leave aside the mother and the gods, and consider the guru. The guru poses a problem, a test. The gods and goddesses are idols of stone; they neither eat nor sleep, nor do they fight or run the ashram. They have no disciples or gurus either. Therefore, the shraddha one has for the gods goes unchallenged and remains undamaged, but the shraddha for the guru gets shattered because the guru lives under the sovereignty of prakriti. As soon as the guru becomes embodied in this world, however great he may be, he is subject to the laws of nature. This applies to all gurus, whether Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Sivananda or Adi Shankaracharya. I am purposely citing names of very great gurus, though there is no dearth of gurus.

As natural laws apply to gurus, the gurus fall short of the ideals people expect when they place their faith in them. In their human form, therefore, gurus become subject to criticism and assessment, and many people lose faith in them. People tend to find fault with their gurus. Maybe the guru has a big paunch or uses a particular brand of oil on his body, so his esteem is lowered in people's eyes. One may offer oil to a stone god and then enjoy the same offering oneself. The faith remains intact because the idol does not react, but if something is offered to the guru who is present in flesh and blood, and he responds by accepting and consuming it, faith in him is shattered immediately. The offering made to the guru in human form will not come back.

Power of faith

Therefore, the guru is the ultimate test of one's faith. When faith is placed in the guru in human form, there is a hassle. If one's faith remains intact in spite of all the assaults and challenges, then one attains real unwavering faith. A disciple of such deep faith can even have the darshan of God. The guru's place is thus considered to be the highest.

The guru is the ultimate barrier which only the disciple can cross over. Who is a disciple? The one who does not peck at and find fault with the guru. Let the guru chew tobacco or wear silk clothes. What should it matter to the disciple? If one decides to carp at the guru and look for faults, then scores of shortcomings may be found. People find fault even with Lord Rama and Lord Krishna. This faultfinding backfires on the disciple and does him harm. However, it brings no harm to the guru, who remains untouched. The faith of the disciple cracks due to faultfinding and then he is at a loss. Shraddha is a very fragile and delicate thing. The milk of faith curdles and is spoiled by just a drop of sourness.

I can cite an example from my Rishikesh days. Swami Sivananda was from Tamil Nadu and used to speak mostly Tamil, not Hindi. Some of his followers criticized him and left him for this reason. Whose loss was it? That of the followers, of course. Shraddha, faith, is the *brahmastra*, the ultimate weapon of spirituality. It is the ultimate armour, the ultimate power of spiritual life. In the *Ramacharitamanas*, it is said:

*Bhavaanishankarau vande
shraddhaavishvaasarupinau,
Yaabhyaamvinaa na pashyaanti siddhaah
svaantahsthameeshwaram.*

“Without shraddha and vishwas, faith and deep conviction, even great siddhas cannot achieve spiritual attainment.”

Some people wonder why I worship the shaligram, which is a stone. I tell them that I have wrought miracles with this stone. What I mean to point out is that even a stone can

become a god if faith is placed in it. Shraddha turns the most mediocre person into a great personage. This is the power of faith. However, it is extremely difficult for ordinary people to have unwavering faith in the guru. There are a number of examples of disciples and gurus in our shastras. The guru knows his job too well. He keeps prodding his disciple this way and that. We have a saying, “Why did the betel leaf get spoilt, why did the horse get stranded and why did the disciple get waylaid?” All this happened because they were not turned upside down and inside out. The guru must keep poking, stirring and turning the disciples around. Some disciples think they should relate to the guru on their terms and conditions, that the guru should bend to their own will. However, the guru is not there to listen to the disciple; he exists to make the disciple listen to him.

Do you think it will ever be possible to have unity of religions?

The meeting point of diverse religions is tolerance and understanding. There is already a movement towards this in India, due to which we are used to adjusting with and accepting other faiths and beliefs. For instance, worship of Devi and Kali is also done in Vishnu temples. Vaishnavites do not even eat onions and garlic, while Kali worshippers perform sacrifices, yet these two different traditions are housed in the same precinct. When people belonging to the Christian tradition can wear guru, shave their heads and put on rudraksha malas, then why shouldn't I put on a Christian robe and a cross, and say, “Hail Mary?” Is there any harm in it? If you can have a yogic name, I can also be called Reverend Simon. What is the harm in it? None at all, because it is in this way that we meet.

The meeting point of different ideas is understanding and tolerance, which ultimately shows you that there is no difference. Just as an orange appears as a globe from the outside but is full of sections inside, in the same way, Christianity, Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, Islam,

Zoroastrianism, Judaism, this ism and that ism, also appear as one when covered by the peel of tolerance and understanding. This is what we have to realize. Even as Protestants and Catholics meet in Christ, here in Rikhhia the Christian and Vedic religions meet in love, understanding, tolerance and acceptance. If the *Gita* can give us salvation, the Bible too can give us salvation. This is what I mean by understanding and acceptance. In India everybody will agree.

People have come here from more than twenty countries to celebrate the wedding of Sita and Rama, the union of the individual soul with the supreme being, the celebration of unity and oneness. We have forgotten our source. We are floundering in the realm of maya and appearance, so we have to reconnect ourselves. We were with God once, but we became separated. How and why we became separated is a different question, but we did get separated. We know that we are separated now and that is why we feel miserable. In order to overcome that misery, we try to escape by running after wealth. When wealth is attained, we run after other things. Ultimately, this leads us to the realization that all we have attained in life is transient. The only way to overcome the great misery, sorrow and gloom within man's personality is to unite with God. In order to unite with him, you have to reconnect yourself. That is precisely the meaning of the word 'religion' – to reunite.

Religion means reuniting with God

Religion is not union, it is reunion. It is not two becoming one, but the one who became two becoming one again. The jiva, the individual soul, you and me, and the entire cosmos are essentially a spark of Ishwara, the divine, just as light and heat are a spark of the sun. Therefore, the individual is essentially immortal, pure and full of happiness, but we experience none of that. We experience mortality, impurity, gloom and unhappiness. To get out of that state, a few people from different parts of the world have gathered

here to witness the wedding of Sita with Rama. Rama represents the absolute. The words God, Allah, Buddha or Jehovah represent the absolute because that nameless God, that nameless substance must be named so that we may understand it. We have to call him something and, therefore, we give him a name, A, B, C or D.

Sita is the individual soul and a demon has kidnapped her. Yes, our Sita has been kidnapped and she is being held in Lanka. Ravana, the demon king, has kidnapped Sita, the individual soul. This demon king has ten heads and twenty arms, and is extremely powerful. He lives in Lanka, the city of gold. This is not a myth; it is the reality within you and me and within everything. The *karmendriyas*, the five senses of action, and the *jnanendriyas*, the five senses of awareness, are the ten heads of Ravana. It is through the senses that we perceive, cognize and realize an object of enjoyment, pleasure and beauty. These ten senses each have two attitudes, positive and negative. That makes up the twenty arms of Ravana. The eyes can see good and they can also see bad. The nose can smell right and it can smell wrong. The ears can hear well and they can hear ill. Every sense, every *indriya*, has a double attitude, positive and negative, and they constitute the twenty hands of the demon Ravana, who has kidnapped Sita, the individual soul.

Now, Sita has to be freed from the clutches of Ravana, but what will free her? Austerity? No! Renunciation? No! Sacrifice? No! There is only one who can free her, and that is God himself. Nobody and nothing short of God himself can make you free! Of course, you should practise yoga, do pooja, say prayers, sing kirtan and perform austerities. You should be good, you should be kind, you should be pure, but that is not the certain way. The only certain way to be freed from the clutches of that demon king, Ravana, is through God. But how do you ask him to free you? If you knew his telephone number, you could dial him, and say, "God, I have been kidnapped here; please take me away." But you don't have his telephone number!

I don't know his telephone number, but there is a hot line between God and me. That hot line is bhakti, love and devotion for God and for mankind at the same time. To love humanity is to love God. To love both humanity and God is complete love. For this reason, I decided that six hundred girls from this community would be given a bridal trousseau each during the occasion of Sita's wedding. You may call it a bridal kit, but I call it a good luck kit. It will contain beautiful silk saris, jewellery, perfumes, cosmetics and sanitary towels for the bride, and a set of clothes for the bridegroom as well. This will be gifted, because to give and to give and to give is man's dharma.

Give, give and give

A story comes to mind from one of the Upanishads. Once the sages were sitting and talking about the absolute God or Brahman. At that time the clouds were passing and from them came the sound of thunder, Da! Da! Da! "What is this thunder?" they wondered. The first sage said, "It means restraint, control." The second sage said, "No, it means give, give and give." The third sage said, "No, it means be kind, be kind, be kind." Then they went to their guru and asked, "What does it mean?" He said, "It means all three." They asked, "How can that be?" He replied, "Human beings should give and give and give." The celestial beings, whom I call the upper class, must control and control and control. They must restrain their senses because they have a lot of money, comforts and pleasures. They are always thinking about how to enjoy themselves more, how to live better, so they spend all their money on themselves. For cruel and demonic beings, such as the Mafia and murderers, the sound is interpreted as be kind, be kind, be kind. So, there are three messages given for three types of people.

We come in the first category, human beings, the masses. For us, the message of the thundercloud is give, give and give. But to whom should we give? To those who need it – the blind, paralyzed, helpless, orphaned, sick and unhappy.

This is also a very sure way to dial God's number. I told you that I do not have God's telephone number, but I do have a hotline. I got it after coming to Rikhia.

I am seventy-five now and I started my spiritual career at the age of eighteen or nineteen. So, for more than fifty years I have only been trying to find out how to contact him. I tried all the ways, but nothing really worked until now. After coming here things began to happen. When you have the feeling of love, unity and compassion for every living being, particularly for those who need it, you get his hotline. He will speak to you. The celestial voice will talk to you. God can talk to you in any language: in English if you are Australian, in Spanish if you are Spanish, in German if you are German, in Serbian if you are Serbian, in Russian if you are Russian. God can speak in all languages, but when he speaks, can you understand him?

Satsang 6

November 27, 1997, Morning

A Swami Satyananda, who was a disciple of Swami Sivananda of Ramakrishna Math, came to Rikhia after retirement. It is a coincidence that my name is also Swami Satyananda, I am a disciple of Swami Sivananda and I also came here for retirement. The people of this village have received a lot of inspiration, help and encouragement. More than anything else, they have received an identity. Rikhia, the name of their village, is now on the world map. So, today I greet you on their behalf. This is the official opening of Sita Kalyanam, when Rama strung the bow and wed Sita.

Stringing the bow of the ego is very difficult. The ego is the gross matter between God and me, the iron curtain that separates reality from appearance. If reality and appearance are to be united, then this curtain of ego has to be lifted. Who can lift this bow? If we can string it, we can unite with prana shakti. Thousands of kings, emperors and powerful princes came to string the bow, but they could not budge it. Why talk of fixing the mind, which one cannot move or even touch? How can one fix the ego, the identification with oneself? That is a very hard bow.

In the *Ramacharitamanas* it is said that King Janaka vowed that only he who could string the bow would wed his daughter, Sita. Many kings and powerful princes came, but none could string it. Rama not only strung the bow, he broke it in two.

The bow broke while he was stringing it. Now what is this bow? It is duality, the separation between you and me. It is the mind, the maya, between God and me. So, on this occasion, which is to remind you of history as well as philosophy, you are welcome here on behalf of the people of Rikhia. I greet you all on behalf of the lowly and humble people of Rikhia.

Greeting the chief guests

I welcome all those who have assembled here from all nooks and corners of India and the world, people of all faiths, religions, castes, creeds, cultures and races. Today we begin the wedding ceremony of Sri Sita and Rama in the most proper and best of traditions. To begin with, we send out the invitation in the name of Lord Shiva. God has millions of names. Which God should I choose? I chose Baba Baidyanath, my neighbour from Deoghar. He is the most easily pleased, most convenient and also the most economical host, as he is my immediate neighbour and can come here any time without any difficulty. Look, here he is seated amongst you and Bhagwati Girija is with him too. He is Shashishekhar, Shashidhara, Gangadhara, Damarudhara, Trishuladhara and Vishadhara. He narrated the whole of the *Ramacharitamanas* to Parvati.

Sati immolated herself in her previous birth when her faith in Lord Rama was weak and shaky and she was full of doubts. In her next birth she was reborn as Parvati Girija, with a heart full of unwavering devotion and faith in Rama. Thus she expressed a keen desire to hear the story of Sri Rama from her husband, Lord Shiva. At that time Shankaraji uttered these memorable and beautiful words: *Sakalaloka jagapavani Ganga! Poochehu Raghupati katha prasanga!* – “Are you asking for the story of Sri Raghupati, which is as purifying as the Ganga?” The Ganga purifies everything that comes in its way from Gangotri to Gangasagar, where it merges in the ocean. Just as the Ganga purifies everything through which it passes, so the story of Rama purifies the hearts and souls of everyone who reads it.

Shiva was very pleased to tell Parvati the story of Rama. He narrates the events from Rama's birth through to his student days under his guru Vasishtha. He describes how Rama killed the demon Tadaka, how he resurrected and redeemed Ahalya, and how he broke Shiva's bow. He describes how Rama went into exile in the forest, where he killed the demons and served the rishis and munis. He narrates how Sita was abducted by Ravana, how Rama met Sugriva and how he crossed the ocean by building a bridge to Lanka, where Sita was kept captive by Ravana.

All the episodes and events of Rama's divine incarnation purify the heart and soul of the reader. Rama's name has its place, but by reading the story of his life, the heart is washed clean of all impurities and one attains the summum bonum of human endeavour. Therefore, on this auspicious occasion, I have invited Lord Shiva and Parvati because they are both keenly interested in hearing *Rama katha*, the story of Sri Rama. In all the worlds, the most earnest devotees of Rama katha and of Sri Rama are none other than Lord Shiva and Parvati. Therefore, I have invited them here to be the chief guests and I shall greet them first.

Bhakti is fulfilment

The story of Rama and Sita, which includes the entire gamut of events and emotions we experience in our daily lives, is only the skeleton. In that skeleton, the *Ramayana* tells us how to practise *vairagya* and *tapasya*, dispassion and austerity. Why do we have to practise *vairagya* and *tapasya*? Are these two qualities necessary and, more importantly, are they possible to develop? What relationship does bhakti have with all this? When you turn towards the west, your back is towards the east. So when you turn towards bhakti, where is your evil mind? Bhakti is the fulfilment, the consummation. Just as the rivers that flow down from the mountains ultimately meet the ocean, similarly, all good karmas are ultimately contained in bhakti.

Bhakti does not relate to the mind, but to the heart and emotion. It is through emotion that you hate or love.

Passion and hatred are emotions. Similarly, *vairagya* is an emotion. *Tapasya* is also an outcome of emotion. When you practise *bhakti*, you are already practising *tapasya*, so it is not necessary for you to find the relationship between *bhakti*, *tapasya* and *vairagya*. According to the *Ramayana*, total devotion to God in any form fulfils all your spiritual requirements. The spiritual requirements of *ahimsa* (non-violence), *satya* (truthfulness), *brahmacharya* (sensual abstinence), *asteya* (honesty), *aparigraha* (non-possessiveness), *tapasya* (austerity) and *vairagya* (dispassion) are all fulfilled in *bhakti*. Therefore, it is very important to develop *bhakti* towards God.

How to manage one's heart? Yoga teaches us to manage our mind first. Management of the heart seems very distant to us. What techniques and ethics can we apply to manage our heart?

When you go back home, leave your heart here. I will open a bank of hearts. I don't mean this physical heart, I mean that deep feeling of emotion. You should practise *bhakti* and try to discover your relationship with God. I have always had very great difficulty in practising *bhakti*. I used to sing, pray and do *japa*, but I did it all through the mind. I sang from the mind, prayed from the mind and did *japa* from the mind. It was the mind which was involved in my practice of *bhakti*. I wanted my heart to be involved in *bhakti*, but I did not know how to involve it because it was a very untrained heart.

I have never practised affection, *sneha*. I have not loved anyone, neither father nor mother, sisters nor brothers, wife nor son. Of course, I never had a wife or son. Loving my disciples would be the last thing I would do. So I have never practised affection, never trained or directed my heart. I have never given my heart to anyone or mobilized it in any form. Even if I worked for yoga, it was not with the heart but with the mind. I met people, I laughed and conversed with them all through the mind, so my heart remained very much untrained.

When I wanted my heart to come into operation, I found it didn't know anything, it couldn't do anything. So it was my problem. Even then I wanted to solve that problem through the mind, intellect, reasoning and logic. When I wanted to bring in my heart, it was just quiet and said, "I don't know." So I decided I must develop some sort of relationship with God. I thought about what kind of relationship I could have with God. Is he my father? I didn't like the idea. Is he my mother? No, I am an old man, I can't love my mother. Is he my sister? No, that is a funny idea. Is he my brother? No, certainly not, I am a rascal.

Ultimately, one idea came to me from somewhere deep in my personality. Right from the beginning of my life, as a disciple of Swami Sivananda, then as a parivrajaka, as an administrator of Bihar School of Yoga and as a preacher of yoga, I always had the feeling that there was someone guiding, coaxing, helping and inspiring me. That idea was latent somewhere in me. So, I came to the conclusion that I am his servant, which is *dasya bhava*. All along, somewhere in the depths of my heart, I have always had the feeling that someone is asking me to do this and I am doing it. Someone is inspiring me to speak and I am speaking. That *bhavana*, that attitude or emotion, was lurking somewhere in the depths of my personality, and it became very clear to me.

It is very important to discover your relationship with God. Are you the servant of God? Are you the son of God? Are you a part of God, just like the light is a part of the sun, or are you God? Christ said, "My father and I are one." In the Upanishads, it is said, "Aham Brahmasmi." The Sufis say, "Analhaq." In my personal life, I found that it was appropriate for me to be the servant of God because, for the last sixty or seventy years, whatever I have done I have been asked to do, and I did it not knowing who was commanding or ordering it to be done. After establishing one's relationship with God, one races ahead with great speed in spiritual life.

We have heard that the soul is pure and without desires, yet in one satsang you mentioned that desires affect the growth of the soul. How is it possible that the soul gets mixed with desires?

The word 'soul' causes confusion. In Sanskrit, the term *jivatma* is used for the individual soul and *paramatma* for the supreme soul. It is the paramatma which is ever pure and beyond desire. The jivatma or individual soul migrates from one body to another, so it gets stuck with desires, passions, maya and goes into another body. When speaking of the pure soul, the word used is paramatma, not jivatma.

Christianity tells us that God is our father, but on the day of judgement, he becomes our judge. I am terrified of that concept of God as my judge who either punishes me or gives me a seat in heaven. How can I develop faith in a God who is both a father figure and a judge?

It is not appropriate for me to discuss controversial points about the religions of others, even intellectually, but I would like to say something about this and you will have to draw your own conclusions. First of all, Christ was not a European; he was not a Slav or an Anglo-Saxon. Secondly, he was not a Christian; he was a dissident Jew from Israel. These are the historical facts which must be borne in mind. There are many cultural differences in his teachings because every nation and race has its own culture. What was the culture of Europe two thousand years ago? Every society, whether Indian, Iranian, Chinese, Japanese, West European or East European, has a culture which is both a social form and a continuity.

Society is shaped by cultural values, and when a religion is accepted it has to mingle with the culture of that society. Think about an Indian who is born a Hindu and later on converts to Christianity. Basically, he is an Indian who becomes a Christian or a Catholic. What happens to him? Instead of repeating, "Sri Ram Jai Ram Jai Jai Ram," he will say, "God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy

Ghost.” Instead of reading the *Ramayana*, he will read the Bible. Instead of going to a temple, he will go to a church. Instead of praying every day, he will pray only on Sundays. Despite this change in his religion, however, he will not give up his Indian culture. He will keep his daughter under his thumb and his children under control. That is culture, not religion. He will eat, smile and nod his head in his Indian way. All his cultural patterns will remain Indian and only his religion will become Christian. In the same way, Europeans were converted to Christianity. They were not Christians two thousand years ago. They must have been following a religion of their own at that time and they had a culture which continues even to this day.

Now, to come to the point of God as the judge. If God is not the judge, then who is going to be the judge? Do you want me to be your judge? No. However, it is true that God is the judge of your karma. He dispenses karma because no other power on earth has that capacity.

You have told us that we have to direct our desires upwards. How can we do that in a family where one partner has a strong internal passion for her divine beloved, but the other partner becomes a barrier in this expression.

It is only a question of adjustment. You have to make certain compromises in a family. If one partner is given to external life and the other to spiritual life, it doesn't make any difference. In India we see it like that. We don't have such problems in traditional Indian families. These problems occur mostly in Europe. If the husband is a Christian and goes to church and the wife doesn't want to go, she wonders, “Why does he go to church?” and he wonders, “Why doesn't she go to church?” This happens because you want everybody to be like you, and that is a mistake.

Husband and wife are two distinct personalities. They each have their own samskaras, karmas and behaviour. Therefore, to expect that both will go the same way is incorrect. You should try to appreciate the diversity in

family life. In Indian families there is diversity of cultures and religions. The husband may be a Shakta and like non-vegetarian food and alcohol. The wife may be a Vaishnava and not even touch onion, let alone meat. In India, most women are vegetarian, and do not drink alcohol or smoke, whereas their husbands eat meat and want it cooked by their wives. However, it is not a problem. She may not like to eat meat, but she does not mind if other members of her family eat it, even though she may have to cook it for them.

We have families in India where the whole family is vegetarian, but one of the sons wants a non-vegetarian diet. The mother of the family does not know what to do, so she cooks meat for him in a separate kitchen. This is how we make an adjustment. Just because you are non-vegetarian does not mean that I should be non-vegetarian too, in order to harmonize the relationship. You maintain your habits and I will maintain mine. If you like yoga, do it. If I don't like yoga, I won't do it, but why should this become a point of conflict? Why should it become the point of difference? In many western families the husband wants his wife to be like him and the wife wants her husband to be like her. This is a mistaken idea and it should not happen.

In any relationship, the two individuals must follow their own path, whether it be husband and wife, boyfriend and girlfriend, father and son, father and daughter, brother and sister or mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. One should not compel the other. In many Indian families the men go to sadhus or sannyasins and become their disciples, but the women don't, whereas in the West, the women often take initiation and become disciples, but their husbands don't. The path one follows depends on the individual character and nature. Therefore, it should not matter if two individuals in one family have different desires.

Love does not mean sameness, love means understanding. If you understand me and I understand you, then we accept one another as we are. If there is no understanding in love, it is not love; it is anything but love. Where there is love there

must be understanding. If you want to love me and me to love you by thinking that we have to be the same, it is not possible. We will fight and perhaps end up in the divorce court. In the West they make this mistake. In India there was greater tolerance in the past. Maybe in modern families it is decreasing, but in traditional and rural families there is still tolerance and adjustment between the family members. In the West it is like an epidemic; the husband and wife are always fighting over little points. They marry today and divorce tomorrow. I think we have to give more thought to this issue.

You have spoken about clearing the debt to your guru. Can you please tell us what kind of debts we have to pay in our life and how can we do it?

Actually, this is not a debt but a social obligation. You live in a society which contributes to your security. Society is an institution. You do not know everybody in society, but still you have to pay for that society. In the same way, you have an obligation to your guru if you have lived with him and he has fed you, taught you and taken care of you for ten or twelve years. He did not charge you any fees, but you have to pay him something. That is the obligation to guru. So, there are various obligations – to society, parents, the rishis, and this is taught to us by our tradition.

How can we become useful disciples and not remain intellectual students?

You have to think about this yourself because I am not a guru now and you are not my disciple. So I do not want to talk about these things very much. You have to think for yourself. If I have to think of everything, then why are you living? Think for yourself.

Can you please tell us about the role of Hanuman?

Hanuman is always the first to arrive wherever satsang is being held. When the satsang ends and everyone leaves, he is the last to go. That is the role of Hanuman in satsang. So,

when you come here tomorrow morning, find out who is the first to arrive. When everybody is leaving, find out who is the last, and try to be the last yourself. Hanuman is a beloved boy. In Indonesia, which is predominantly a Muslim country and has the largest Muslim population, boys jump on the trees and say, "I am Hanuman!"

Hanuman represents bhramacharya, strength and valour. In India there are many akharas where young boys are trained in wrestling. They are all named after Hanuman: Hanuman Akhara, Bajarang Akhara, Bajarang Bali Akhara. Every town and village has an akhara where young children are taught the art of wrestling. These akharas are small rooms, barely ten feet by twenty feet, with sand pits where young boys go in the morning to do push ups. Many years ago, maybe in 1945, I went to an akhara and did one hundred and eight rounds of surya namaskara at one stretch.

The *langoti* or loincloth is also associated with Hanuman. A langoti is like a suspended bandage. What I wear is called a *kopeen*. A langoti is something else. In India they say, "Eh! Keep your langoti tight," which means maintain your brahmacharya; it should not become loose. Hanuman was famous for his brahmacharya. He was an *akhandabrahmacharin*, he kept unbroken brahmacharya and never broke his celibacy. So, Hanuman represents strength and true brahmacharya. For him, all the women in the world were mothers. In India, the elders tell the children to go to akharas where wrestling is taught, because the akhara plants the seed of brahmacharya. Indian people consider this to be very important, not only for the individual, but also for social discipline.

Hanuman is also famous for service, *seva*. He was Sri Rama's doorkeeper. There are beautiful stories about him, which you should try to read. There is a special hymn called *Hanuman Chalisa*, which every Indian knows by heart. Indians have so much faith in Hanuman that on Tuesdays, the day that has been designated for Hanuman worship, the queues at his temples are several miles long. People line up

to offer incense, laddoos and flowers. Hanuman is an ideal for all Indians. Every other god has become a matter of controversy for some reason or another. For example, people ask why did Rama leave Sita, or why did Krishna play with girls, but Hanuman is non-controversial. He is first in service and in strength as well as being a very great and learned man.

Hanuman was very intelligent, well educated and qualified. He was a true professional. These are Hanuman's three qualifications: he could fly, he could swim and he could make his body smaller than an ant or bigger than a giant. He was *atichatura*, a most clever man. That is why Rama made him his personal assistant. Rama himself was supremely intelligent. He was not a foolish man. In the *Ramacharitamanas* he is called *chatura shiromani*. He was not only intelligent, he was the crest jewel, the king of intelligent people. When Rama is super intelligent, his peers should also be highly intelligent, otherwise they cannot get along.

Hanuman is also the greatest *bhakta*, or devotee of Rama. Rama is in his heart all the time. He is full of devotion for Rama with the spirit of a servant. His relationship with Rama is that of master and the servant. I chant the *Hanuman Chalisa* every day when I bathe. When I complete one hundred rounds of japa, I offer my prayers to Hanuman to free any innocent person who may be in distress.

I am terrified of dying. How can I become immortal?

Well, this is one of the wonders of the world. Every day people are going to the grave, but still you want to be immortal, knowing fully well that you cannot be. If you want to overcome the fear of death, follow the path of sannyasa. Sannyasa will make you free from the fear of death. Even if you are not able to follow this path lifelong, at least become a sannyasin for six months or a year. In Thailand, all Buddhists live as monks or sannyasins for at least fifteen days of their lives. They retire from their families, go to their guru's monastery, shave their heads and don the ochre

robe. For a minimum of fifteen days they sleep on the floor, go to different houses at ten in the morning for bhiksha and eat before midday. For the rest of the day they read the scriptures. This rule applies to every Buddhist family, even to the king and princes of the royal family, and I definitely think it is a very good tradition.

Of course, to become a lifelong sannyasin is a good thing, but not everybody can make a permanent commitment to sannyasa. A permanent commitment is very difficult and could also disturb the social fabric of society, but everybody should try to get away from the mundane activities of life and family for a few days at least and stay at a good ashram. Select a clean, quiet place. Rishikesh was a very beautiful place when I was there, the most beautiful place that I have seen in the world. Now, however, there are auto-rickshaws, cars, trucks, buses and boats, and people run around like ants all day. Rishikesh has become a *puri*, a pilgrim centre, but previously it was a *tapobhoomi*, where one lived a solitary life in total silence, amidst beautiful forests, gardens, rivers, mountains, trees and birds. There was no dust or heat, but now it is a place of pilgrimage where many people go.

Today ashrams are developing even in the West. You can go to live with the guru, shave your head, change your dress, eating and sleeping habits. Live a very simple life for fifteen days, six months, three, ten or twelve years. After twelve years it is better to remain as a sannyasin! It is shameful to live as a sannyasin for twelve years and then revert back to normal life. Rikhia will welcome short-term sannyasins, but you will have to use your body, mind and talents for the benefit of the people around, not for your own evolution. Living with me is not an easy thing because I do not meet people. So you should not come here to be near Swami Satyananda. No, I am not interested. I don't want anyone close to me. For the duration of your stay, you must forget me. Many people come here thinking, "I'll have Swamiji's darshan every day," but I don't want people here who keep on looking at me like that.

By becoming a sannyasin you will become free from the fear of death, because this fear is very unnatural. You should not be afraid of death because everything that takes birth is going to die. Why fear that which is inevitable? If death were not going to happen, if you were immortal, if that were the law, then your fear would be justified. However, one thing in life is certain – death. Birth may not take place but death is certain. From the moment you were born, death has been chasing you, day by day, minute by minute, second by second. It is not able to get a grip on you now, but one day it will.

Satsang 7

November 27, 1997, Midday

In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Arjuna asks Sri Krishna a very important question. How can one be a part of the world and yet an outsider, that is, how can one achieve akarma in the very midst of karma? In other words, is it really possible for a person to perform karma or action in the world, but remain uninfluenced by the consequences of the karma? I cannot understand someone who marries in haste one day and seeks sannyasa the very next day. Nor can I understand someone who takes sannyasa one day, gets married the very next day and comes to me for a blessing. What I can comprehend is that one may remain a sannyasin while doing various kinds of karmas, such as seeking worldly pursuits, discharging duties, enjoying pleasures, money, property, married life, and even facing court cases, tax problems, fights, quarrels and enmity.

Arjuna wanted victory and the kingdom too, but he did not want to fight against his kith and kin. There was delusion in his mind. As long as man has delusion and ignorance, he can be neither a proper sannyasin nor a proper householder. Delusion and ignorance are the roots of this great confusion. The puzzle of this crossword is the basic delusion. Once delusion is destroyed, the rift between sannyasa and household life is also bridged.

All our sages and thinkers down through the ages have been teaching us to live in this world like the lotus flower, which is untouched by the surrounding water. This is how they explained it. The lotus exists because there is water. The basis of the lotus is the water itself. If there is no water, there can be no lotus. If this is so, it would be logical to say that since the lotus lives in water it must get wet, but it does not. Whenever you touch the petals or leaves of the lotus, you will find that they are absolutely dry. The sages cite another example as well. The tongue lives amongst a set of thirty-two teeth. How perilous is its condition. At any moment the tongue can be bitten to pieces, but despite this, it manages to remain unharmed. Even so, people should learn to live unaffected in the midst of the struggle of life. They should be as dextrous as the tongue and learn to live in the midst of continuous problems and difficulties, facing all the ups and downs, hopes and despairs of life, without being tainted. This was the second piece of advice that Sri Krishna gave to Arjuna.

Mental metamorphosis

There are eighteen chapters in the *Gita*. The opening chapter is 'Vishada Yoga' or the 'Yoga of Despondency'. The second chapter is 'Samkhya Yoga' and the last chapter is 'Moksha Karma Sannyasa Yoga'. The *Gita* describes eighteen different stages of mental awareness, or mental actions and reactions, in its eighteen chapters. A person striving for spiritual life undergoes eighteen stages of mental metamorphosis. These begin with depression, oscillation and the feeling of despondency. In this state one feels unwell, bored, unhappy, dissatisfied, hopeless and negative about everything.

Depression or despondency is the first symptom of a troubled mind and its problems. The life of a human being does not begin with asana and pranayama, but with dejection and despair. Think it over and see if I am right or wrong. Had your mind not been dejected, depressed, agitated, restless, unhappy and miserable, would you ever have set about balancing it? Would you ever have made any

effort in that direction? Why else do you want to stabilize and straighten out your mind? Tell me if I am making an erroneous statement. Why don't you leave your mind as it is? Because you suffer, you become miserable, and that is the beginning of depression and dejection. The mental agony begins to trouble you; there is sleeplessness and lack of concentration due to this troubled mind.

Making the mind one-pointed

When the mind wanders and wavers, you seek a remedy and learn how and where to apply it. At that point you take up asana and pranayama to steady the mind and make it one-pointed. Why do you want to control the mind and make it tranquil? Why do you want to concentrate the mind? Because your mind is creating trouble and you feel awful. You feel tense, restless, bored, your mind is dissipated, you get angry, your mood keeps on changing. It is only when your mental state makes you feel unhappy that you try to find a way to control it. The reason why you take up yoga is because your mind is unhealthy.

The day that mental agony, unhappiness, suffering and misery completely come to an end and there is no sorrow left, you will begin to feel: I am bliss, I am ananda, paramananda, chidananda, satchidananda. Neither happiness nor misery is my name. I am neither birth nor death. I have neither father nor mother. I am chidananda roopa. This is the state of sannyasa. The geru cloth is the symbol of a sannyasa sect, but not of sannyasa. Sannyasa is a very high state of awareness, a different plane of mind and personality, a different level of human life. Many great souls have experienced this state and lived in it. When one reaches that stage, joy and sorrow, poverty and prosperity, hunger and satiation, cease to influence the mind.

What should one do to please God?

To please God you must serve the poor, destitute, disabled, sick, hungry, naked and helpless. You must love the orphans

who are loved by no one. Be the servant of the downtrodden, the poorest of the poor, the lowest among the lowly. If you want to please God, serve him in the poor, the helpless and the sick. You don't have to go to a temple or church. You don't have to become a swami, sanniyasin or yogi. You don't have to practise asana, pranayama or meditation. Just do whatever you can with your mind, knowledge, influence and might to help the poorest of the poor, the lowest of the low. God will not be pleased if you fill your pocket. God loves those who love him in this form.

If an educated, well-dressed man comes to your door, you offer him a chair and greet him with a handshake, but when a naked and hungry beggar comes to your door, you kick and abuse him. You have an altogether different way of behaving. Sometimes a poor widow comes to me seeking help. Swami Satsangi tries to inquire into her situation to find out the truth. I think that even though she may not be telling the entire truth, even though she may have some money in the bank, no Indian woman can be untruthful about being a widow. No Indian woman can tell a lie about her husband's death. I just tell Swami Satsangi not to waste her time making unnecessary enquiries and to make good use of the money she has by buying the poor widow a sewing machine.

What I mean to say is, that you should give attention to those people who are completely neglected by society, who nobody bothers about. If you cast a helpful eye towards such people, God will turn his grace towards you. This is not only what Satyananda preaches, all the holy books, the Bible, Koran, *Ramayana* and Vedas, tell us this. Christ, Mohammed, Sri Krishna, Mahatma Gandhi and all the great teachers have said the same thing. God is called *deenabandhu*, friend to the unfortunate, helpless and lowly. Have you ever read about an *amirbandhu* God, who is friend to the rich and fortunate? If you believe that God is a friend to the poor, then you should play the role of benefactor to the poor. In this way, you and God will then become very close to each other.



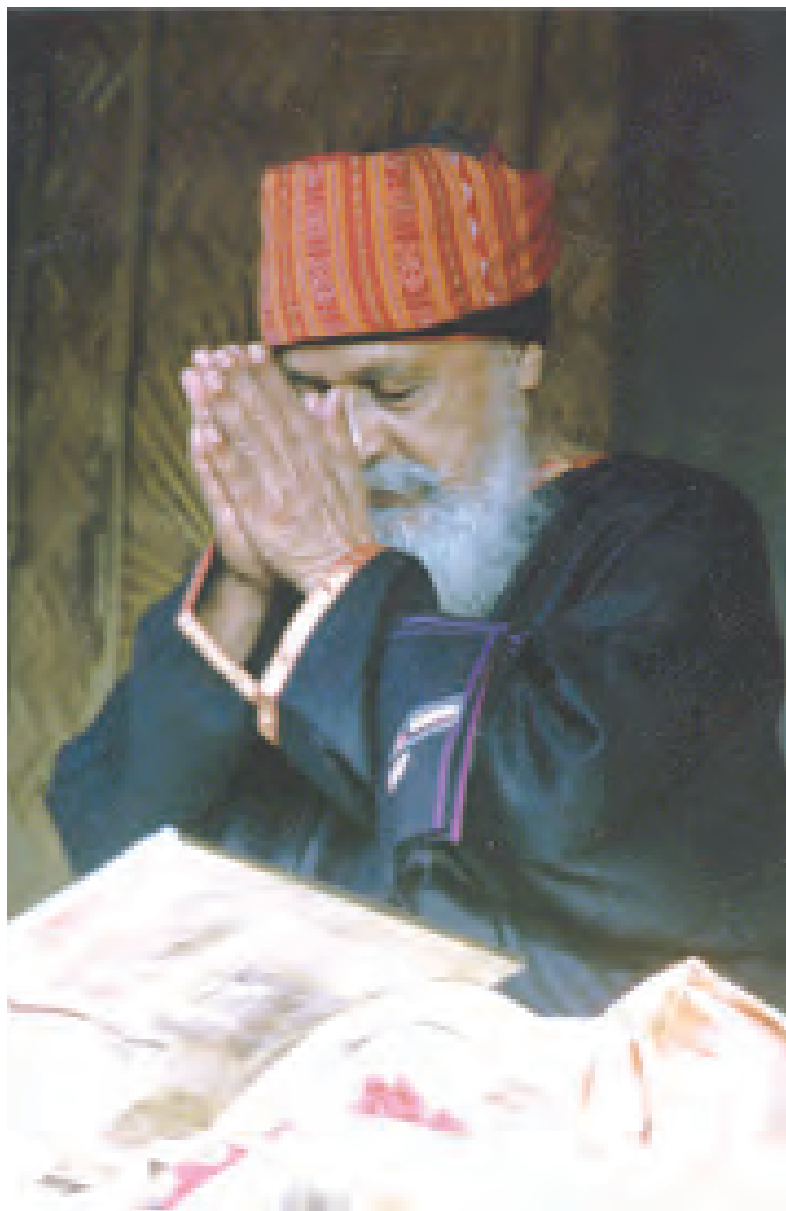
Yoginis performing the Lalita Sahasrara Naam Yajna



Sri Swamiji and Rev. Antoinette Schoenmaker singing hymns during the Cosmic Mass



Celebrating the Cosmic Mass



Sri Swamiji offering his pranams to the sacred Ramacharitamanas

Anyway, this was a very good question. I am glad to talk to my disciples on such matters. You must have read or heard about Mother Theresa's death. She was so blessed by God. She enjoyed such grace from God that she could serve the most neglected, condemned and despised members of society till her last breath. She picked up those people whom nobody even dared to look at. Nobody is ready to spend money on the poor. Nobody wants to help out a poor boy or get a poor girl married. After all, how much does a mangalasutra cost? Three to five hundred rupees at the most. Can't you spend that much from your own pocket? A single doctor's bill is nothing less than three hundred rupees. You are ready to spend everything on yourself, but you are not prepared to spend one paise on a poor man, and still you talk about God! No. You have to respect his creation, his maya.

Serving the poor

The poor people of the world are a challenge to your spiritual life, whether in Asia, Africa or anywhere else in the world. There are people suffering mentally, physically and economically. What percentage of your income are you spending on them? A single bottle of liquor costs a minimum of one hundred rupees and it evaporates within no time. Similarly, people complain that cigarettes have become very expensive and yet they smoke their money away. Miss these things just for a day and divert that expenditure to the poor and needy.

Ten percent of your income must be spent on God's creation. This is the purpose of spiritual life. Otherwise do not talk about God. Ten percent of thirty days is three days. Whatever you spend on your own enjoyment and luxuries for three days should go to the poor. Abstain from these pleasures just for three days. Some people enjoy non-vegetarian food, some enjoy eggs, some go to see movies and some enjoy themselves in other ways. They spend four or five hundred rupees easily on their enjoyment and pleasure in a day. Three

days' expenses would amount to fifteen hundred rupees or so. Divert this money for the education of a poor girl.

How can you serve the poor, the poorest of mankind? Who will tell you all this? You have to find out how to serve. If you want to attain nirvikalpa samadhi, savikalpa samadhi, bhava samadhi or samadhi of any type, damned or blessed, if you want to have a vision of divinity, then find a way to serve the poor. Your body, blood, soul, youth, wealth, intelligence, everything should be geared to serving and raising mankind to a proper position. There are innumerable poor widows in our villages. They have no future, no life of their own. Their existence is meaningless. They have neither bhoga nor yoga before them. They are made to feel useless. Widows come in the condemned category.

This is the state of society that I am pointing out to you. Have you ever given a thought to reforming society, to making it better by serving the poor and needy? It is not wrong to do pooja or to read the *Ramayana*, Bible or Koran. It is not wrong to visit a church, mosque or temple. It is not wrong to seek *satsang*, the holy company of sadhus and sannyasins, but the most important worship of God is to see him in his world of creation.

*Jale Vishnu thale Vishnu
Vishnu parvatamastake
Jvaalaamaalaakule Vishnu
Sarvam Vishnumayam jagat.*

Vishnu is in the oceans,
In the land, in the mountain peaks.
In the garland of flames,
In every nook and corner of the world.

Vishnu is omnipresent. He pervades the whole earth. God, you are immanent in everything. You are present in all forms of manifestation. You are there in the mango trees, in the water and in the soil. Water is present everywhere in the form of all created beings. Air, fire and space are also

everywhere. Similarly, God is present everywhere. Think this over carefully.

What is the importance of dance in Indian culture?

Dance is the self-expression of nature or prakriti. It is her language, her idiom, for manifesting her splendour and rich potential. Nature, maya and prakriti are all the dance of God. When maya dances, creation takes place. Lord Shiva knows many different kinds of dance. That is why in this kirtan he is addressed as Nataraja. *Nartan sundar Nataraja* – Nataraja the Lord of dancing majesty; *Shivaraja, Shivaraja, Shivakami priya Nataraja* – Shivaraja is the best among the dancers.

Once there was a dance contest between Shiva and Parvati. Shiva began his divine dance and adopted different postures, mudras and expressions, which Parvati went on imitating. As the tempo of his dance rose, Lord Shiva suddenly went into the Nataraja posture, raising his leg. Parvati could not imitate this mudra because of her modesty. Parvati knows all the mudras, gestures and postures of dance, but we never see her dancing. Our kings and rulers found it improper for females to dance. They thought it offended the modesty of women, so dance became a social taboo for women. When the command comes from the ruler, it becomes a social norm and nobody wants to go against it.

However, there are several dances of Parvati, as there are of Shiva. Bharat Natyam is one of the traditional schools of her dance. *Bharat Natyam* is also a classical text on dance written in Sanskrit and it has been translated into many languages. It is the basis of all the dances that followed later. Dance is not just moving the body in any way you please. It is a language in itself through which you can narrate an entire story. In Bharat Natyam there is a dance called *Katha kalakshepam* in which the entire story of Shiva's birth, along with the birth of the universe and the incarnation of the gods, is narrated through different dance mudras. Just as the entire English language and literature were produced

from twenty six letters of the alphabet, in the same way, these mudras combine to express the entire gamut of creation.

Kabirdas says, “Shoonya shoonya, shoonya ke para.” Is this the same shoonya that one experiences in dhyana or does it refer to some other shoonya?

This is a tricky question. If someone who has never tasted rasagulla asks me what rasagulla tastes like, how can I answer? If I want to answer, how can I, and if I do not want to answer, how can I keep quiet? The shoonya state comes three times. First, when the gross consciousness is transcended, it is called shoonya. Secondly, when subtle consciousness is transcended, then also there is a shoonya state. The third state beyond these two, which is called the nirvikalpa state, is also a shoonya state. Therefore, the word is repeated three times. The ultimate principle goes beyond all these stages. I think this much of an answer should be enough for the moment.

Last year we had the good fortune to visit Raghunath Kutir. We were told that you worship Sri Rama, Sita and Hanuman there. If God is formless, then why this idol worship, and why is idol worship important?

It is very easy to describe and accept God as formless or *nirakara*. It is even easier to talk about the formless God. Nobody can dispute it because nobody has seen God. If you describe him as formless, having no fixed name or place, nobody can challenge you because nobody has seen God. Whatever you say about the formless God, one has to accept. Refutation or challenge can only come in the case of known things which both you and I have seen. You and I can dispute the appearance of a squirrel and describe it differently because both of us have seen it.

Once three disciples were quarrelling over the exact colour of the chameleon. They could quarrel because all of them had seen the chameleon while it was changing colour. However, God with form, *sakara*, is very difficult to

comprehend, to explain, to accept and to ingest, but it is the easiest thing to dispute. Even a small child can criticize the concept of God with form.

People have written volumes about God without form. I was born in a family that believed in the formless God. I began my spiritual quest with the philosophy of the formless God. I had studied Adwaita Vedanta and Shankaracharya. I had never given a thought to God with form, nor had I thought over the formless God, because it was not possible for me to think of a formless God. The God who has no form, name, abode, colour or attribute simply cannot be a subject of contemplation.

However, later on I had many experiences which made me realize there is somebody talking to me and instructing me. He can talk in English and Hindi. After that, I began to meditate on the God with form and results began to show up very soon. I started *sakara upasana* very recently, only after coming to Rikhia, and it started with an image of Sri Ganesha. Ganesha said, “Satyananda, you have just given me names, now watch and see my maya, my miracles.” This is the background of my transition into sakara worship.

Sakara worship

In Rishikesh, under the instruction of my guru, I took part in rites and rituals, but that was done as a duty. My heart was not in it. If I was assigned the duty of worshipping Shiva, I did it. If I was asked to do Rudrapath, I did that. But, in Rikhia, I began to light an incense stick in front of images of Ganesha. Burning incense sticks before all the four images I received of him turned out to be a costly affair. But why only burn incense for Ganesha? All the gods enjoy incense sticks. Thus I made it a daily routine to burn incense sticks in front of all the images in my pooja room. As soon as I get up in the morning, the very first thing I do is light the incense sticks, even before washing my hands and mouth. This is my sakara worship. What does sakara worship mean? It means to worship God according to your own faith and belief.

The *Gita* (2:46) says:

*Yaavaanartha udapaane sarvatah samplootodake;
Taavaansarveshu vedeshu braahmanasya vijaanatah.*

“To the Brahmana who has known the Self, all the Vedas are of as much use as is a reservoir of water in a place where there is a flood.”

There is an immeasurable quantity of water in the ocean, but you can take away only as much as your container will hold. Similarly, you can only grasp God to the extent and depth of your awareness, feelings, soul, personality and the totality of yourself. Swami Satyananda could not grasp the formless, nirakara God then, nor can he do it now, nor will he ever have that capacity. Swami Satyananda’s capacity is limited to lighting a lamp and an incense stick in front of Ganesha’s image and singing his praises as follows:

*Jai Ganesha, jai Ganesha, jai Ganesha deva
Mata jai Parvati pita mahadeva
Phool chadhe pan chadhe aur chadhe meva
Laddoo on ke bhog chadhe santa kare seva.*

Therefore, worship God according to the capacity of your intellect and feelings. Adopt a pooja which delights your heart and can move and melt it. The chosen deity is called ishta devata, because it is what your heart opts for, what your heart wishes for. It is that God who enthrals and captivates your imagination. So, read the *Ramacharitamanas* devoutly, profoundly and with understanding. Tulsidas has illustrated this very point throughout the *Ramacharitamanas*. In fact, this is the theme of the *Ramacharitamanas*. The nirakara becomes sakara. The formless God becomes manifest in a recognizable form.

Tulsidas has not neglected the nirakara aspect of God, *Sohamsmi iti vritti akhanda*, which means continuous awareness of Soham. Tulsidas talks about both the God with attributes and the unattainable *kaivalyapada*, the path of final liberation. But the important point he makes is that worship or *upasana* of

God means to set your heart on any aspect of God that attracts and satisfies you, that is within the grasp of your limited awareness, that stirs your feelings and sustains your interest.

Now let us turn to Sri Rama, who is my ishta devata. After all, I was born as a kshatriya, in the very same Ikshwaku dynasty, the family of the sun god. I was advised to worship Sri Rama by my family. Sri Rama is everything to me. He is my God, my hero, my ideal. He is my brother and my father, not from the point of view of a sadhaka, but as a boy born in the same family lineage as Sri Rama himself. Thus Rama was always with me. However, when I went to Rishikesh my guru gave me the mantra of Shiva, *Om Namah Shivaya*. I asked my guru how I could have this mantra when my ishta devata was Sri Rama. My guru resolved this dilemma very easily. He told me that both Shiva and Rama were mutual friends, very amicable towards each other. There was no conflict or opposition between the two. When I learned about this from my guru, I had no doubts. I reconciled the two very amicably and began my worship without any clash or conflict.

Although I am not a very high soul myself, I know that however depraved and fallen a man may be, he always looks up to a person who is great and good. He never worships another fallen man or villain; he is drawn only to a virtuous hero. He himself may be a complete rascal, but he accepts only a virtuous hero as his ideal in life. The best example of goodness in humanity is none other than Sri Rama. Sage Narada told Valmiki that in the whole history of the human race only one ideal man had reigned supreme and that was Sri Rama. *Ikshwaku vanshaja prabhu Rama nama janahi sutah*. Rama was born in the Ikshwaku family and was the epitome of virtue, heroism, power, intelligence and character. So I worship Sri Rama as my ishta devata and Shiva with the mantra.

I had Sri Rama as my ishta because whatever you worship and meditate upon seeps into your inner being. It casts a long indelible imprint on your consciousness, which passes from birth to birth. You may remain a villain, a bad character, a rogue, in the present lifetime, but there is every

possibility of reaching and realizing your ideal ishta in some birth sooner or later. I love the sakara God as much as a Bengali loves his rasagulla, or a South Indian loves his idli and dosa, or westerners love their beefsteak. No one should have a doubt about nirakara coming down into sakara. Let it be very simple. Choose the form of your ishta devata and worship him or her, ring the bell, read the holy books, light a candle and an incense stick, praise him or her and quietly go to bed. Most certainly God will bless you.

How can we experience spiritual life while living in the world?

You should enlarge the scope of your sadhana from mere asana, pranayama, japa and meditation to the service of those who are in need. If you are a mason or carpenter, you should help them to build a house. If you are a brick maker or know something about agriculture, horticulture or animal husbandry, you should help them in those ways. What I am propagating is the 'care for the unfortunate' culture. This should become a part of your sadhana. Imparting know-how to those who lack that knowledge is also dharma. Dharma and sat karma are the foundations of spiritual life. If you care for the unfortunate, God will definitely bless you with peace and tranquillity.

What is the difference between destiny, fate and God? We have heard that God always puts you to the test. Is the test then a matter of fate or destiny?

God does not put you to the test. God knows that there is a law of nature operating in the world. He knows how much and what work you have put in and what the result accruing from that work will be. Man has his karma and he reaps what he sows. Prakriti has made this law. There is the doctrine of karma. If you sow wheat, you cannot reap coriander. If you plant a babul, you cannot expect mangoes from it. This is the irrevocable law of nature which the whole world is familiar with. There is no need to bring God into it. Man

should choose his karma, his action, with care and a sense of responsibility. There are some karmas which can completely write off the previous wrong karmas. If you realize that you have committed serious lapses in the past, you can make up your mind to tread on the righteous path thereafter. But what happens to the past karma that is already committed? Our rishis and munis have found a way out for that also. They have prescribed certain karmas to undo the past karmas and free one from these consequences.

In India, Lord Shankara is seen as a shivalingam and also as a jyotirlingam. What is the difference between a shivalingam and a jyotirlingam? Why are only twelve shivalingams called jyotirlingam? Is the shivalingam at Pashupatinath in Kathmandu a jyotirlingam?

There is a very simple answer. Whenever a shivalingam emerges on its own at a particular place and begins to be worshipped, it becomes a jyotirlingam. From Narmada we have the Narmadeshwara lingam, from Gomati, the Gomateshwara lingam. These lingams were consecrated and ritualistically established in their places of self-origin and thus became jyotirlingams. Among the twelve jyotirlingams there is no mention of Pashupatinath.

Please enlighten us about the marriage between Tulsi and the shaligram.

I do not know too many details. I am a man of faith. One day I wished to have a shaligram and several arrived here from various places, including Nepal. Now I have a collection of shaligrams. I keep some inside and some outside. Once a year I celebrate the marriage of Tulsi and the shaligram. My heart overpowers my head in this respect. I go by my feelings of reverence and faith. I consider Tulsi to be the queen of all medicinal herbs. From 1990 onwards I have been worshipping Tulsi for the sole purpose of health. I want her blessings to keep me fit in old age. When the car gets old, a lot of repair work becomes necessary to keep it going. I was inspired to

worship Tulsi, so I had a shrine made for her and began to worship her morning and evening. Every evening when I leave you all during the program, I go for that purpose. I seek only one blessing from her and that is to keep me fit.

It is now seven years since I started daily worship of Tulsi for health and she has blessed me with perfect fitness. I have never had coughs, colds, stomach upsets, fatigue, fever or constipation. When I was in Munger I used to cough a lot. It would continue for months and no medicine would work, but now there is an end to that. This is the direct result of Tulsi worship. One day I noticed a pest on the Tulsi plant. Someone suggested the use of the pesticide Thymet, but I declined and placed the shaligram under the plant instead. Tulsi became free from disease and I married her to the shaligram. This is a true event, a fact.

In this world many people resort to tantra to harass others. As a result the lives of ordinary people become hell. How far is it proper to employ tantra in this way? What can ordinary people do if tantra is used like this?

If these tantrics had really been so powerful, the world would no longer be the habitable place it is now. The negative effect of such practices is experienced because of your own fear. If you are courageous, nobody can harm you. You should not bother about such occurrences and stories. All over the world people are afraid that someone has cast some spells on them and, therefore, they are sick. Everybody suffers from this superstition and there is no way out of it unless you overcome your fear.

Desires bring disappointments. How can we free ourselves from desires without taking sannyasa?

A sannyasin is not free from desires. It is extremely difficult to be free from desires. It is only by God's grace that one is freed from desires. If an ordinary man becomes desireless, he will ruin himself. Desire strengthens the life process. It is the motivating power of the mind. So do not ask me how to get

rid of desires. Though I accept that non-fulfilment of desires leads to nervous breakdowns, still don't ask me how to curb desire and expectation. Desire is the basis of progress and struggle in life. It is the basis of willpower. Don't think that sannyasins are free from desire and expectation? *Atmajnana*, *Brahmajnana*, *Brahmanubhuti*, *aparokshanubhuti* are all desires and expectations. Sannyasins like us are third rate sannyasins because we are a bundle of desires and aspirations. Don't get entangled with such lofty ideals. Keep your life simple!

We have heard about love, devotion, compassion and suffering. Is there a place in yoga and in life for joy?

Why not? Nobody has asked you not to enjoy life. Even if someone tells you not to enjoy life, you will still enjoy it. But here the point is different. Why don't you share your joy with me? I am lame, orphaned, sick, paralyzed, unfortunate, unhappy and hopeless. You may be full of joy, but let me share a little bit of your joy. Nobody objects to your enjoying life. Nobody has any objection to your living in the glamour of maya. It is perfectly all right to enjoy good clothes, food, picnics, friendships and so on, but don't ignore your brothers and sisters who are less fortunate than you, because their numbers are increasing. In many countries today twenty to forty percent of the population is living below the poverty line. Millions of people are suffering from all sorts of diseases. One day the number of people living in poverty may increase to sixty percent and those who are well off will be in the minority. If the population of the unfortunate increases because of our neglect, what will the condition of society be? There will be social anarchy, political upheaval and cultural devastation. There will be accidents in history.

Just imagine a village of five hundred men and women. Of these, only twenty people in the village are well off. They have motor cars, radios, television sets and other luxuries. They dance and sing, wear good clothes and send their children to private schools, while the other four hundred and eighty people live a life of suffering. They don't have

enough to eat and some have nothing to eat. They have no medical facilities. Even God does not fulfil their demands. What will happen to the twenty people who are enjoying life while the rest are going without? One day the four hundred and eighty people who are living in poverty will break into their houses, loot and murder them all. Therefore, those who are fortunate should not allow the population of the less fortunate to increase. If this happens, revolutions and massacres will take place. Girls and women will be raped. The religion and culture will be destroyed. History is the witness. Revolution takes place in any society where the poor are in the majority. So, be careful.

You may certainly enjoy life and use your money to make yourself happy, but remember that the happiness you seek through sensual enjoyment is nothing but escapism. When you want to escape from yourself, to forget yourself, what do you do? You drink a little champagne, find a nice girl, go out to a nice place to dance and sing with friends. This is not enjoyment, it is escape. Sensual life is a way to escape from yourself. Please think it over. Sensual enjoyment is used to avoid confrontation with reality, to escape from it. You are not actually solving the problem, but keeping it in a pending file. So, even if yoga provides you with a means of enjoyment, ultimately it will not help you. Your joy must be to help the people who have no joy. Your enjoyment and happiness should consist in giving and sharing with people who are unhappy. This is the central teaching of the Bible, of Christ and Saint Francis. It is also the central teaching of Buddha, Mahavir and Mahatma Gandhi. This has been the central teaching of every person who has thought properly with a sane mind. It is not Swami Satyananda's teaching, I am just re-echoing what they have said.

Why does India remain at a low level of development and how can we progress?

There was a very great mahatma in this century known as Ramatirtha. He was a professor of mathematics in Lahore

and later became a sannyasin. He went to Japan where he was accorded a grand welcome in the palace. There he saw the bonsai of a beech tree in a small pot. The beech normally grows up to fifty feet tall, but in that pot it was dwarfed to a mere twelve feet. Ramatirtha was struck with wonder on seeing it. He was told that the tree was two hundred and fifty years old and yet never grew any bigger because the three main roots were cut regularly, rendering it incapable of further growth. This made Swami Ramatirtha think of the glory of India, his own country, as dwarfed like a bonsai tree, with the three main roots cut.

Look into Indian history if you want to know who has cut these roots. The three roots of human development are thought, conduct and personality. Thought may not be visible, but conduct and personality are easily seen. Our personalities have been castrated. Girls have been made lambs and boys asses. Our rulers and kings taught us proper conduct, but all three roots need to be nourished together. When all three roots are allowed to thrive, each and every ordinary person will become capable of progress and development. Indian people have been enslaved and even now we remain slaves. We have not really changed. We cannot progress unless and until we become free in thought, conduct and personality.

A nation whose young sons and daughters cannot think and behave independently can never get ahead, no matter what means you may employ. You will have to ponder this and bring about a fundamental revolution. We are standing on the threshold of the twenty-first century, but we do not know how to define the word 'widow' in the modern context. Nor have we been able to change our concepts of marriage, caste, religion, and ashram, according to modern times. Even in the twenty-first century we continue to live like people of the sixteenth century. The twenty-first century is the century of total change.

There are many countries in the world where young children no longer write on slates. They pick up the alphabet

on computers. Can't we also change our personality and patterns of thought? Most certainly we can change them. We have masons in our country, but they are no match for their foreign counterparts. We should be ashamed of our social system or the lack of it. The father who breeds, but cannot feed his children, has no right to open his mouth and protest. All the blame must go to the man in whose house children are born but die of hunger and sickness. I could rebuke you much more, but now I will stop short. I have given you a piece of my mind on the pretext of answering your question.

Satsang 8

November 28, 1997

On the 4th of December, at the time of *godhuli* or dusk, the marriage ceremony of Sita and Rama will take place. This year, in the presence of everyone, nine hundred girls will receive good luck kits. Six hundred of the girls are daughters-in-law who have come from other villages to marry and stay in the Rikhia panchayat for their entire lives, and three hundred are girls from Rikhia panchayat, who will marry and go to their husbands' homes in other villages. I am creating a precedent, giving an example and a way to attain the godhead. You may practise mantra or prayers, you may go to a temple or church, but never forget the unfortunate person who is suffering, who does not have what he needs. What he does not have, you and I have in plenty. If I have ten loaves of bread, I can easily give away five because he needs them and I don't. This good sense came to me in 1990, after coming to Rikhia.

In 1990, on the day of Kartik Poornima, when the moon is brightest, the voice came to me: "Look after your neighbours as I have looked after you." Yes, God did look after me. At the tender age of eighteen or nineteen I left my home, my family, everything. He looked after me, so I am still alive. Yes, I am fully alive, gracefully alive, vibrantly alive. Every cell and atom of my body and mind are full of life, not because of my own doings, but because of him. I

don't believe that I am alive because of me. I am what I am because of him. So he said, "Take care of your neighbours as I have taken care of you."

Care for your neighbours

What does the word 'neighbour' mean? The person who lives next door to, beside, in front of or behind my house. However, for a man whose heart is open, the whole world is his neighbourhood and everyone is his neighbour. One who has a small, closed heart thinks in terms of, "This is mine and that is yours." He makes a division between what is mine and what is yours, but I do not want to be limited by that thought. Rather, I believe that everything belongs to you, O God, because you have given it to me. You are the owner, the giver, the treasurer. You are the ocean of prosperity, grace, mercy and love. You gave everything to me so that I could give to others. Everyone should think like this.

Of course, you must earn money. You must have a nice wife or husband and a nice house. You must educate your children, but these things are not the goal of life. If they were, there would be absolutely no difference between a man and an animal, except that a man walks on two legs and an animal walks on four. Hunger, sleep, sexual life and fear are common to human beings as well as to animals. You can see this for yourself. So where lies the difference between animals and people? Are we different in any way from the animal kingdom? Yes, we are different in one way, and that is because we are aware of God. That is the whole message I have to give.

I thank you very much for coming to this gathering where we have decided to think about, talk about and feel God in our midst. I have been telling you how to achieve this. Do you know why I don't tell you God's number? There is one reason. If I give you his number, you will call him and say, "God, give me a daughter, give me a son. I want that building. I want to become a chief minister or a prime minister." Then he will say, "Satyananda, what are you

doing? I gave the number to you personally and you have made it public!” So I will only tell you when you renounce your personal desires. You can’t squander God’s grace just on yourself.

Share your wealth

You have carelessly squandered away all that God has endowed you with. You are splurging all the wealth that God has given you on your own self. You spend hundreds of thousands of rupees on yourselves, but give only a few paise to the poor and needy. Even the sadhus are earning well. I have some sannyasins here who have millions of rupees. Whether a householder or a sannyasin, you should spend only as much on yourself as is proper and proportionate according to your dharma. God has blessed you in this life with a beautiful house, a beautiful spouse and beautiful children, but you must care for the rest of the world as well. You must think about the thirty percent of the population that is much less fortunate than you and do something for the miserable ones who are sick, poor, lame, crippled and handicapped.

You must think ahead. What will happen when the thirty percent of the world’s population living in poverty today multiplies to seventy percent tomorrow? They will certainly overpower you. They will raid and loot your houses and property. What I am saying has a deep social significance and a political purpose as well. I am not just chatting casually to you. When their numbers increase from thirty to seventy percent, then your lives will be in peril. Thieves, dacoits and vagabonds will kidnap your daughters and terrorize you into signing cheques for large amounts of money in their names. This is not something that will take place in the distant future. It is already happening in the present. Therefore, I am cautioning you. When I am explaining a spiritual truth, I tend to talk about social and worldly matters as well. So, you must share what you have with the have-nots of society.

Love without limits

I have a share in your fortunes. By this, I don't mean my physical entity. I love one and all without exception. I am not a limited individual. I was born with a destiny to fulfil. My guru told me everything about my mission and myself. Therefore, I am claiming one of your pockets. Let the other be with you, but one of your pockets belongs to me. One pocket belongs to you and the other belongs to mankind. Have one bank account for your family and another account for mankind. Divide your money, wealth and fortune. Divide your good luck and let me have a portion of it. That means let mankind have it, otherwise you will have social problems.

This is my practical advice to you. I am not talking about spirituality now. The have-nots, numbering twenty to thirty percent of the population, are not only in India or Africa, but all over the world. There are millions of blind, lame, deaf and dumb people. There are millions of orphans and destitute children. There are so many poor who need a helping hand. There are so many sick who need your love and care. Jesus said this. Today you swear in his name, but what did you do during his time? You crucified him. He came to save, to redeem. He gave you this message; I am not saying it for the first time. It was pronounced two thousand years ago and Christians must remember this.

A life of comfort and luxury is a suicidal life. A simple life is a good and balanced life. Don't be affected by riches. Dollars cannot create destiny, dollars cannot create personality. If you do not listen to the message you are being reminded of today, a day will come when the unfortunates will number sixty to seventy percent of the population. They will break into your houses, kidnap your children and steal your money. This is already happening in many countries. I am not just speaking about spiritual matters. I am talking of that reality which will help your society. If there is heat, fire, disaster and death all around and you alone live in an air-conditioned room, how long can you survive? So, you must try to improve the conditions outside your family. The world

exists beyond your wife, husband and children. “We two and our two” is not the solution. This idea must come into focus and it is exactly this which is the purpose of Sita Kalyanam.

There is a scarcity of good qualities in life. Can there be a social revolution if we add the spiritual dimension to the existing educational pattern?

This idea is not coming from you, but from us. Education has two purposes. The first is to equip you with qualifications so you can earn a livelihood in agriculture, commerce or technology. Through education you receive instruction about the outside world. The second purpose is to impart knowledge about the inner world by which you can remove the darkness of ignorance within you. This form of education instructs you about yourself, your body and your social dealings. In today’s system of education we have neither.

Can a farmer’s son, a mason’s son, a washerman’s son, a carpenter’s or a potter’s son learn anything about farming, masonry, carpentry or pottery in the village schools? When he finishes middle school has he learned to drive a taxi or auto-rickshaw? No, he does not pick up these skills at school. If he does learn any skill, it is done privately outside the school. None of the girls from the villages know how to knit or sew. All they learn at school is some irrelevant historical information like what the name of Aurangzeb’s daughter was, where Shah Jehan was buried, or when emperor Ashoka invaded Orissa. Thus the instruction imparted at school is of no use either in material or spiritual life, either in the outer or inner world.

I have visited all the educational institutes, missionary schools, gurukuls, Arya Samaj schools, schools run by sadhus and mahatmas. All the schools are competent as far as the three ‘R’s – reading, writing, arithmetic, are concerned, but they are just not teaching anything of national value. Education must cater to the social and national needs of the time. I am not talking about international matters, I am talking about our own country. India is on the threshold of the twenty-first century, but the mentality of the people

is back in the sixteenth century. One comes across many villagers still living the life of the fourteenth century. Some towns are living at the level of the nineteenth century where trains still run on coal and steam.

In India, the schools give nothing more than elementary education. The nation cannot make economic progress unless and until the schools train the students to earn their livelihood. There is no freedom from poverty, families cannot look after their members and elderly parents are neglected because students receive no practical training for their lives.

Purpose of education

On the spiritual education front, there is complete darkness and ignorance. People do not know what spirituality is. The Upanishads talk about two vidyas, two types of instruction, para and apara. *Apara vidya* refers to formal, academic or worldly knowledge which helps you to earn a living in daily life. It gives empirical knowledge about mathematics, science, astrology, physics, chemistry, biology and other material sciences. The other vidya or instruction is called *para vidya*. This is transcendental knowledge about the creator and his creation. It is spiritual knowledge by which you can unite with the imperishable, immortal Self, the atma, the ultimate principle of this entire cosmos.

These are the two forms of knowledge, yet nowhere throughout the world have they been incorporated into the education system. The stress is only on empirical knowledge and that, too, is useful in only a few countries. Therefore, the nation will have to rethink these two types of education. In fact, the whole world will have to take a fresh look at education. One type of education will not serve the whole world. In Africa, Latin America, Southeast Asia, China and Central Asia, only one system of education was adopted, which is why there is economic imbalance. There is a lot of intellectual frustration. Students spend many years at college and university, yet they have no jobs when they graduate.

The purpose of education should be twofold. First, it should make the student capable of earning his own bread and butter as early as possible, without spending so many years in school. Second, it should develop the personality so that the student can discover his own self. In the absence of this kind of education there is total anarchy. One of the major reasons for social disorder on every continent is that we have not discovered appropriate forms of education for different types of people. In Africa or India, children are taught when the emperors were born and when they died. What does this matter to a poor carpenter, a farmer or a mason? He wants his son to earn as soon as he is eighteen. The son graduates, but he does not know what to do. He does not even know how to drive a car, so he cannot become a taxi driver. In school he is taught about political leaders, kings and queens and how many children they had. This kind of education does not help him at all. These things can be learned later when one is twenty-five or thirty.

Children should be taught from an early age how to cope with the demands of day to day life according to their particular circumstances. A person in Western Europe has to cope with certain circumstances. In Africa, Asia and Latin America, the circumstances are entirely different. India is an agricultural country. Its education must be oriented towards agriculture, farming, cattle breeding and small business. A sophisticated, technological education will not help this country. The more sophisticated technology becomes, the more you can expect unemployment. That is the reason for unemployment in highly technological countries in the West. Machines do everything, so the unemployed sit back in their homes and take cocaine, marijuana and brown sugar.

Necessity of struggle

Another important point is that, so long as a country or a people are struggling to survive and develop, they will be mentally, emotionally and physically healthy. But the moment this struggle comes to an end and the people are

provided with everything they need in life, the rate of suicide will increase. Suicide is a result of the depression syndrome. When depression sets in, the electromagnetic energy in the brain is reduced due to lack of struggle. The struggle, the daily conflicts in life, the fight to survive, keeps you healthy. You can be sure that crime and suicide will proliferate in a society that provides people with everything they need or want. Sweden is a country with an ideal welfare state. People can obtain everything with the utmost ease, yet the largest rate of suicide is found there.

You must understand the necessity of struggle. It is a part of the scheme of life. In countries like India people are poor; they have nothing to eat, but still they strive to live. They will not commit suicide because they are struggling and have no food to eat. A man's child may be starving, his wife may be ill, he may be jobless or unwell, but he will never think of committing suicide. As long as there is the will to struggle, to live, one will not commit suicide. One can only commit suicide when the brain becomes lazy. A lazy brain commits suicide. And when does your brain become lazy? When everything is easy.

Need for practical training

Therefore, our present educational system needs a lot of change. Education cannot and should not be universal. It has to be modified for different types of people. In India, it should be oriented towards agriculture because more than seventy percent of the population is based in agriculture. Right from the very beginning rural children should be taught how to tend a cow or a goat, how biogas can be produced, how to cultivate vegetables, grains or fruits. These things are not taught in the schools and people do not demand this type of education from their government. The education system needs to be changed completely.

There are primary, middle and high schools here, but these boys know nothing. I call the young boys and say, "Go and learn how to drive an auto-rickshaw, learn how to drive a

car.” I call the girls and tell them to learn stitching. Sometimes we also teach them stitching and weaving so that they can earn their daily bread. Schools do not teach anything practical and useful. In fact, if the schools were closed, you would lose nothing, rather a lot of money would be saved. Schoolteachers should not be offended because what I am saying is right. Gandhi also said the same thing. He emphasized a basic education which is different for different people.

Therefore, those of you living in villages, towns and cities must rethink your education system. You must seriously consider what you need to add or amend in the present education system. If you can see that what is taught in schools today is not at all necessary, then why go on admitting your children and increasing the number of students in schools and colleges? There is a boy sitting here with us who was asked by his teacher the other day where milk comes from. He replied that it came from the dairy. He did not even know that cows yield milk. You will all laugh if I tell you the funny things that are happening around here. All these parents sitting here mutely send their children to missionary schools. All the children learn at school is how to speak in English and Hindi, but they do not know how to milk a cow.

Swami Satsangi is a first class graduate, but she was not able to tell the difference between a cow and a bull till she came here. I am telling you frankly that whatever I learned at school never proved useful to me. My father’s money was wasted on my education for many years. Had I stopped my academic education and renounced at the age of ten, I could have become another Shankaracharya! I lost those ten young, brilliant years of my life. At the age of eight or ten one is very bright, and by the age of eighteen or nineteen one is full of conflicts and problems. I wasted my precious youth learning useless things about geography and history. Whatever I memorized from the history book at night would be completely forgotten by morning. On the other hand, whatever I learned for twelve years at my guru’s ashram has been useful throughout my life.

Even the smallest practical teaching proved highly valuable to me later. I learned how to carry bundles of firewood, how to use a pickaxe and sickle, how to garden, cook, build a house, keep accounts, do auditing, type and write articles. The most valuable lesson I learned was that life is ever flowing, always moving ahead. One has to just watch the phenomenal world as it comes and take it in one's stride. I took sannyasa at the age of nineteen and lived in my guru's ashram for twelve years and I never used the knowledge that I learned at school. It has proved useless. The three R's, reading, writing and arithmetic, are useful, but beyond that nothing helped me. I never used it, never! In my guru's ashram, the education was very solid. Even today, when I am by no means young, if I have to open a shop and conduct a business, I can do it.

Spiritual school curriculum

The most important thing Swami Sivananda said was that just as there is an education system from kindergarten to university, similarly there is a schooling system in spiritual life. God exists, so you have to think about him. You have to meditate and pray. You have to purify your heart. I asked, "But how?" He said that the kindergarten of spiritual life is service. What comes next? Loving others. Then the next class is "Give, give and give." Don't say, "You give to me," say, "I give to you." This is primary spiritual schooling – "serve, love and give." This elementary class of spiritual life will prove very useful.

After this, Swami Sivananda said that we should purify the self: purify the mind, heart, intention and actions. Practise non-violence, truthfulness, celibacy, non-possessiveness, living a life of poverty, non-stealing, cleanliness, contentment and so on. Purification means that just as you clean your dirty clothes by putting them in detergent, so you put your heart in detergent. Soak it in detergent and clean it. How? Swami Sivananda said, "Suffering and pain is the crucible into which nature throws a man whenever she wants

to make him a sublime superman.” You have to accept pain and suffering. Don’t be afraid of pain. Don’t depend on the things of worldly life. Riches will not go with you! What did Jesus say? “It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.” I don’t mean that you shouldn’t become rich, but you should not depend on wealth as your security in life. Security in life is purification.

After purification, Swami Sivananda spoke of meditation. He said that meditation is like going to college, it is higher education. In meditation or prayer you enter a state of *shanti*, peace or tranquillity, where you become one with God. There is only God in front of you, whether in the form of Rama, Christ, Guru or Govinda. Finally comes realization. So, serve, love and give are elementary education. Purify is intermediate education and meditation is college education. Realization is post graduate education. This is the curriculum of spiritual schooling. Swami Sivananda gave me the mantra, “Serve, love, give, purify, meditate, realize, be good, do good, be kind, be compassionate, bear insult, bear injury.” This is very difficult, but it is the highest sadhana!

Education begins in the womb

This kind of education must be imparted to a child right from the beginning of life. Education has to start right from the moment the baby enters into your manufacturing machine. The seed has to be planted; the samskara has to be injected. From the time of birth up to seven years, the child must live with the mother because the child is the son of the mother. The mother is the first guru, teacher and inspirer. The mother is also the first one who is capable of spoiling the child’s life. Yes, if a child is spoiled, the blame should be placed squarely on the mother not the father.

The child drinks her milk. She feeds him in the womb. The child carries her genes, her DNA structure. The blood in his body came from her. She kept him when he was born. Who did the child see and touch first? Who did he first

address? “Ma”, the mother. Therefore, the mother is entirely responsible for the child’s destiny. Education starts in the womb and continues in the home up to the age of seven. After seven years, society takes over the child’s education.

Is the achievement of artha and kama possible in spiritual life?

Prosperity (*artha*), desire (*kama*), virtue (*dharma*) and liberation (*moksha*) are the four legs of the table of life. The table must have balance, so all four legs must be equally strong and stable. This means that the whole of life should be divided into four *ashramas*, or periods. The first twenty-five years of life, *brahmacharya*, are for education and experience. The next twenty-five years, *grihastha*, are for hard work, living with one’s wife and children, relatives, friends and society, toiling, rejoicing, sorrowing, maturing. The third quarter is *vanaprastha*, when you have to retire and think about your spiritual self. Who am I? How am I related to the universe? What is God? How am I related to him? What is this nature, who created it? When did he create it? What is dharma, what is adharma? Finally, the fourth period of life, *sannyasa*, is for moksha, realization, merging the self with God.

Those who go via this route should dedicate one part of their assets and earnings for others. They should share their brain, their talents, capacities and material achievements with the have-nots of society. In the Vedas, Puranas and Smritis we are advised that householders should perform yajna. According to the *Gita*, yajna does not just mean a ritual where some of the pooja items are consigned to the flames and thereby dedicated to God. The word *yajna* consists of three syllables, ya, ja and na, which refer to the three processes of every act we perform, viz. *utpadan*, *uparjan* and *vitarana*, that is, production (*ya*), earning (*ja*) and distribution (*na*).

In the life of a householder sharing one’s wealth with others is of the greatest value. It is the first duty of each householder. The produce from your farm, the profit from

your business, the salary you earn from your job must be shared with other members of society who are less fortunate than you. Do not forget that you owe a share of your wealth to the needy members of society. Remember that you do not have an exclusive right over the wealth you call your own. Grihastha ashrama is a system of distribution. You cannot lay an exclusive claim to your earnings because you have acquired them by depriving others of their due share. Whether you are a businessman or a taxi driver, you make your profits by cheating others. Nobody in society can earn wealth independently, in isolation.

You can earn only because of the social network of interdependence. Everybody depends upon everybody else. Spiritual life in relation to artha and kama is possible only when you share your wealth with others, when you distribute your wealth equitably. If you earn and spend only on yourself or save and deposit your earnings in the bank in your own name, then dharma and moksha cannot be attained, and spiritual life cannot be lived without them. This kind of self-indulgence is only deception. It is leading an undisciplined life. Grihastha ashrama does not only mean reproducing and earning wealth, it definitely includes proper distribution of wealth in society. You must give back to society whatever it has given to you in the form of personal wealth and prosperity.

Social debt

If you fulfil your social obligations, only then can you expect progress in your spiritual life. A householder must fulfil his social obligations, whether he is a farmer, businessman, teacher or industrialist. Whatever his income, accomplishments and achievements, society must be a compulsory shareholder in it. You must spend a large part of your income in public and social services. Social services are what society needs. Society needs hospitals, orphanages, food distribution centres in famine-ridden areas, so you must contribute your share. You should not spend or utilize all

your income or achievements only on yourself and your family. If you do this, then you are a miser, a selfish person. Don't be selfish.

It is true that a householder can reach God. A man with a wife and children can have God's grace and darshan, but saying this is not enough. It is very pleasant to hear, "Oh, a householder also can have darshan of the Lord." So then you think, "I don't have to take sannyasa, I don't have to become a monk." However, you are just deluding yourself! Yes, a householder with a wife and children, with all the problems, tragedies, comedies and idiosyncrasies, can have the vision of God, can attain God's grace, but he will have to renounce selfishness. He will have to completely destroy mean-mindedness.

He should set aside a part of his achievement, whatever it is, whether grain or money, power or name, for a social purpose which the people in that country need at the time. Every country has different problems at different times. Somewhere there is anarchy, somewhere crime, somewhere AIDS, somewhere drug addiction. The problems are everywhere. So, you have to give a part of your earnings and assets to alleviate them and fulfil your social obligations. That is your social debt because you cannot develop, earn or prosper without a proper, stable society. You should definitely understand this.

So, artha means prosperity and kama means desire. What is that desire? The desire to have wealth, to have a good wife or husband and to have children. These are the three main desires. Most people want a good partner, a comfortable house or flat and, if possible, a car, and then a child. Everybody likes to have a child. These three desires are not an impediment in spiritual life, rather they are an expression of your nature. Just because you want to have a child or attain prosperity does not mean you are worldly. This is very clearly explained in the *Gita* and its commentaries. Arjuna asked Krishna the same question, and Krishna said, "No. You must follow the dharma which nature has designed for you."

If you are a householder, then you should be a householder, and in the world, everybody is a householder. Everybody has a wife or husband, everybody has a child, except for a few like us. We sannyasins are a minority in this world, but most people have these three things. So how can you think that God will not be pleased with you if you also have them? God will be pleased with you, but please remember that your child is not the only child. There is some other child also who needs your love.

Satsang 9

November 29, 1997, Morning

The marriage of Sita and Rama

Beauty is one of the most important attributes of God. So, please try to look most beautiful when the marriage celebration of Sita is conducted. God is not ugly. God is *satyam*, *shivam*, *sundaram* – one attribute of God is truth, another is auspiciousness and the third is beauty. On the day of Sita's marriage, everyone should look as beautiful as possible. Marriage is a ceremony where everything is beautiful, glamorous, exquisite. It is one of the happiest occasions of life, when purusha meets prakriti, when God meets nature, when the unmanifest meets the manifest in order to propagate. So, come to the marriage on the 4th, dressed in auspicious clothes. The shastras consider geru to be inauspicious apparel. Even I won't wear black or a langoti. I shall also wear something appropriate for the joyous occasion. King Janaka may even envy my appearance.

In the *Ramacharitamanas*, the *swayamvara* of Sita and her marriage to Sri Rama is described as follows: "The endless ocean of love looks beautiful. The waves of this ocean swell up to see the full moon in the form of Sri Rama. The drums are beating in the skies and the heavenly dancers begin to dance. Brahma and the other gods and munishwaras are eulogizing and blessing Sri Prabhu Rama. Colourful flowers and garlands are being showered upon him from the skies.

The kinnaras are singing melodies. The whole universe is rent with triumphal cheers in which the sound of the breaking of the bow sinks inaudibly. Everybody, all the men and women, are overwhelmed with joy and are telling each other the grand news that Sri Rama has broken Shiva's bow.

"The court bards and minstrels are praising the Lord with an endless chain of compliments. People are making offerings of elephants, horses, wealth, coins, clothes and other riches. The mridanga, drums, conch, shehnai and all the auspicious musical instruments are playing sonorous music. Young damsels are singing in every nook and corner. The queen, along with all her companions, becomes exceedingly happy. It is as if the parched paddy has received a fresh shower of rain. King Janaka gives up his anxiety and attains joy in its place, as if a tired swimmer at last has caught on to a raft to keep himself afloat. All the contesting kings are outshone by the victory of Rama, like the flame of the lamp is outdone by the daylight.

"How can Sita's joy be described? She is like the chatak bird getting the sweet raindrops of the Swati nakshatra. Lakshman is eyeing Sri Rama like the baby chakor gazing up at the full moon. Then Sadanandaji consents and Sita goes up to Sri Rama. Her friends and companions accompany her, singing songs of joyous union. Sita is walking as gracefully as the royal swan. Her beauty is beyond description. She is the most beautiful among many pictures of beauty. Sita is holding the *jayamala*, garland of victory, glittering with the triumph of the universe. Although she feels boundless love for Sri Rama in her heart, her body is completely restrained and there is no overt expression of love for him.

"As she approaches her Lord, she is so spellbound by his divine beauty that she stands still like a picture. Understanding her state of mind, her friends secretly nudge her to garland Sri Rama. Coming out of her spell, Sita raises her hands to put the garland around Sri Rama's neck, but is too shy to do it. Her hands look like the stems of lotus flowers

being offered to the moon. Sita's friends once again burst into song and Sita manages to garland Sri Rama. As the garland is placed on Sri Rama, the gods begin to rain down flowers. All the kings in the court withdraw into themselves like the bud of a lotus shies away at the first rays of the sun in the morning.

"The whole of Janakpur, the earth and the sky, begin to reverberate with music. The wicked lose face and the good beam with happiness. The gods, kinnaras, humans, nagas and munishwaras charge the atmosphere with their shouts of applause, proclaiming Sri Rama's victory and their hearty blessing. The wives of the gods are showering flowers on the couple and singing. Everywhere resounds with the Vedic chants of the brahmins. The birds do not stop singing in praise of Prabhu Rama.

"The earth, heaven and nether world are engulfed with the glory of Sri Rama's wondrous feat of breaking the bow and marrying Sita. The people of the town are waving lights, performing *arati* to Sri Rama, and offering the couple the best of all that they have. Sri Rama and Sita are such a beautiful couple that it seems as if an erotic romance and beauty are strung together. Sita's friends suggest that she touch Sri Rama's feet. She is overawed by his brilliance. Remembering the story of Ahalya, Rishi Gautam's wife, she hesitates. Sri Rama, aware of Sita's unparalleled love for him, smiles secretly in his heart."

What is the role of women in today's society? Is marriage necessary or is living independently more important? Why are we celebrating the marriage of Sita with Rama during Sita Kalyanam, and how is it relevant to us today?

The principle and philosophy of marriage is union, not between matter and matter or energy and energy, but union between time and space. It is union between the mathematical principle of plus and minus. Nobody knows when the principle of union first took place. When purusha and prakriti united millions, billions and trillions of light

years ago, this perceptible universe came into being. This union between purusha and prakriti is the union between consciousness and nature. When this union is the beginning of the universe, the cause of the whole cosmos, why shouldn't man and woman unite? This is the tradition of union.

In our society, marriage plays a very important role. We sannyasins who have renounced and forgone the joy of marriage do not deny its importance. We think marriage is not only important for a woman, but also for a man. This wild beast of a man has to be domesticated. The process of domestication is possible only through marriage because the ruler is not a male, the ruler is female. Remember this. It is she who trains this wild man, domesticates him and teaches him how to behave. So we do not decry marriage at all, rather we want you to marry.

The marriage of Sita with Sri Rama, which we are conducting here, represents the union between prakriti and purusha; you may also call them Shiva and Shakti. Rama represents the cosmic being, the ultimate or absolute consciousness, and Sita represents mahashakti, cosmic energy. Shiva, Rama, absolute consciousness, God, Allah, Jehovah are all names coined by us. God has no name; absolute consciousness has no name. In English, we call this principle absolute consciousness. In Sanskrit it is called *paramapurusha*, *paramatman* and *parameshwara*. There is no need to fight over these names. We can also say that there is consciousness, which is called *chaitanya*, and there is matter, which is not conscious. When they meet, the cosmos is born; millions and trillions of stars, suns, moons, everything is born. Similarly, when man and woman meet, a child is born. When a seed meets the earth, a plant is born.

Everything that is born is a result of the union between purusha and prakriti. From the smallest bacteria to the largest constellation in the universe, everything that takes birth, everything that manifests, is a product of the union of purusha and prakriti in different realms. There is union in chemicals, in minerals, in the vegetable, animal and

human kingdoms. Even in the mind, when a thought that is masculine in nature meets a thought that is feminine, a result accrues in the form of purity or impurity, good or evil. Good and evil are both born out of the union of two types of thoughts. The thoughts unite, so you have to be very careful about what kind of bride or bridegroom you choose in your mind. The mental union is important. A good, holy or pure thought is the result or the son of the union between two forms of thinking.

Marriage

In all civilizations and cultures throughout the world, those that have gone and those that have stayed, emphasis has always been laid on the marriage of women. A girl should be married properly because she is the creator of quality. She can create a Rasputin or a Hitler and she can create a Christ or a Rama. It is she who created Buddha and she who created demons. She can create something of quality or something substandard. Therefore, care must be taken regarding her marriage.

From the moment a girl is born, especially in India, her parents are obsessed with the idea of her marriage. For ten, twenty or thirty years, until she is married, they keep thinking about it. It was the same in Europe during earlier times. In Asia, a girl's marriage is still an obsession for the parents because throughout the history and development of their culture, they have realized that the girl is the most important member of human society. She is the most precious jewel and, therefore, it is the duty of every parent to see that she is given to a man in a proper way.

The preliminary ceremonies for Sita's wedding will start soon. Tomorrow the ceremony of haldi will begin. The women from the village will come for it. Of course, I know life is not smooth sailing. There are always quarrels in the family due to differences between husband and wife, which is natural. A wife should not feel that she can leave her husband just because they fight, because he is unfaithful or

does not earn, because he drinks or gambles or is a very free type of man. The bond between husband and wife does not break even in the grave, not even after death. This is the ideal form of marriage and must be adhered to.

In Vedic culture there was no divorce. It was accepted that problems arose in the family between the husband and wife, but the Vedas did not allow divorce. They said that if a husband and wife could not get along together, they may live separate lives, but the question of remarriage did not arise. The reason for this was very simple. A woman wants security, stability, and power. Not only in India but everywhere in the world, a woman wants stability. She wants to stay in one place and not move from there. A woman wants security wherever she comes from, whether Africa, Asia, Europe or any other part of the world. The third thing she wants is to rule. She wants to be the *gharwali*, not the owner but the ruler.

Inheritance rights

In our country, ownership is not a problem because when a girl is married, she takes her inheritance with her in the form of gold, silver, diamonds and pearls. In the West this is called a dowry. We do not call it a dowry, we call it her inheritance. The word is *dahej*, meaning *daibhag*. *Dai* means that it is to be given to her, that it is her right. My daughter, your daughter, everybody's daughter has the right of inheritance to her parents' property. However, you cannot give her one acre of land because it is immovable, so you give her gold, silver, pearls, diamonds and cows. Nowadays a car, television set, radio, washing machine and other things in vogue are given. So, a girl should not be sent out of the family with an empty suitcase. That is not the tradition in India.

In India, even the poorest family that has difficulty obtaining daily meals spends with an open heart and open hands at the time of marriage. Everyone becomes generous. At the marriage time of your daughter, sister or any female member of the family, you must sign a blank cheque because it is her right. So, ownership does not come into the picture;

she is already the owner. According to recent law, a girl has rights to the property of her parents, not just to the jewels. If you have to sell a part of your land today, you cannot transfer or sell it without the signature of your daughter because she is a partner in your property, even after her marriage.

Although in western countries and elsewhere a lot has been spoken about the plight of women in India, the situation is not actually like that. Even a girl from a poor family will leave her parents with a full suitcase. Therefore, at Sita's wedding a dowry must be given in the form of jewellery, ornaments, beautiful saris and other necessary articles. This is not a marriage tax. Many people joke about it, saying it is necessary to pay a marriage tax, but the dowry is not given in that spirit. You spend so much money on your son and he becomes a vagabond. He does so many reprehensible things. What have you given to your daughter? Therefore, Sita's wedding is a lesson to all of us that we have to look after this community of women, so that they will become good mothers and our future generations will be of a better quality.

Swami Niranjan, you should also say something on this point because you may have your own views. I am seventy-five, so I don't belong to the younger generation. Young people may think differently, but I think this way.

Swami Niranjan: During Sri Swamiji's life, I have seen the abundant love and affection for womankind in his heart. I have seen him encourage and support thousands of women. He has helped not only those who were sincere and dedicated, but even those whom he knew would betray him. There have been many who betrayed his compassion, who took his helping hand for granted. Observing all this, I used to wonder why he was so concerned? It is only now that I have begun to understand and respect the qualities of women. Society has played many games with women all over the world. They have been used, misused, abused and all kinds of unpleasant things have been done to them. History

is a living example. Ancient cultures still existing in the world today are based on principles of repression and control by the other half.

However, as Sri Swamiji said, it is the cardinal principle of nature to bring the two opposite poles together in order to bring forth a new creation. In spirituality, we talk of spirit and God, but why ignore the physical aspect? Other traditions have stated these things differently, but for the ordinary person who lacks willpower, understanding, wisdom, compassion and intelligence, there is a system to be followed. All the scriptures, traditions and cultures that have arisen from time to time in this world have emphasized that you take birth only once, die only once and unite with the opposite sex only once. The seed that is put into the ground sprouts only once, and even this once represents union, not duality.

Today society is changing and it will continue to change tomorrow. We have to understand that the fault lies in our understanding, in our wisdom. We can't think beyond our own head and our head is limited. Our brain, mind, concepts, beliefs and feelings are limited. This is the point that Sri Swamiji has been making again and again. We think in terms of 'we two and our two'. Nothing more exists beyond what is recognized and identified as 'mine'. This is not the solution for either individual or social development. We may be intellectual, but we lack wisdom. People in the villages may be illiterate, unable to read or write, but they definitely understand this point. On this aspect they are more intelligent than city dwellers. For them, life is a process of adjustment.

Yesterday Sri Swamiji was speaking about suffering. He said we should help those who are suffering and try to give up luxuries and comforts. We should stop indulging in sensual experiences and desires, although this is the trend of society today. Society all over the world has become patriarchal, but the spiritual traditions have always maintained that society must be matriarchal in order to survive and evolve. The Vedas have stated that we are *bhoomi putras*,

the sons and daughters of mother earth. This ancient thought represents matriarchal thinking. Sri Swamiji has said many times that it is the mother who introduces you to your father. The father never introduces the mother. What does this mean? The inherent understanding, the inherent intelligence with which we come into this world identifies with the mother first. Later on, we become brats.

The point to remember is that women have to be respected, cherished and loved. You may think of love as physical, but physical interaction between man and woman is not love. It is an expression of your inherent desire, sexuality and passion. When you attach yourself to somebody, it is an expression of passion. Therefore, you have to understand that you have never loved in your lives and you do not have the ability to love at all. You are not educated because you do not understand what love is. Holding each other is not love; being with someone you like is not love. It is only fulfilment of your passion.

Sri Swamiji: It is not possible for you, me or anyone else to define love. We can only say that ‘this is not love’ and ‘that is not love’. What is love? If we could define love, then we could define God. When I decided to present bridal kits to the newly married girls, people just came forward spontaneously to help. On the 4th in the afternoon, six hundred newly married girls from my panchayat or community, some of whom are still little children, will come here to receive a bridal kit. Presentation of a bridal kit to even one girl is so difficult. Those of you who have married your daughters know that very well. Nowadays a bridal kit costs thirty to fifty thousand rupees. This may not be very much for people from the West, just one or two thousand dollars, but for us, fifty thousand rupees means something.

You can do anything to help others at any time, but marriage is only once in a lifetime. As you die once, so you marry once. This is what we think. When I meet the young widows from time to time, I ask them, “Why don’t you remarry? You have a problem because there is nobody to

maintain you. So you work like a labourer and you have to work very hard.” They reply, “It doesn’t matter, Swamiji. We can live in poverty. We can eat only once a day. We can wear shabby clothes, but we don’t feel like remarrying.” I have come across many women like that. This is a problem in India, not because society does not allow widows to remarry, but because they themselves prefer not to. I am not talking about educated girls; they have gone berserk.

Swami Niranjan: As Sri Swamiji has said, the nature of women is to be secure, stable and to rule. While helping with the prasada distribution, you have seen the conditions in which the villagers live. But in the villages, the men can never exploit the women because, in India, the woman is *griha Lakshmi*, the ruler of the house. She is like the home minister, and in many countries the home minister is more powerful than the prime minister. It is she who controls the family wealth, the gold, silver and jewellery.

Sri Swamiji: In case you don’t know, I will explain the most important point. In India, there is a law that those of you from other countries must understand. It is enacted now, but it is a very ancient law that has survived for thousands of years. A man cannot touch, sell or transfer the wealth that belongs to a woman, no matter whether she is his wife, mother or sister. The wealth that belongs to her will go to her daughters or daughters-in-law, but not to her husband or son. That is called *streedhanam*. The word *stree* means ‘wife’, and *dhanam* means ‘wealth’. If the husband compels his wife to give him her wealth, whatever it is, whether property, a car, ornaments, gold, silver or pearls, she can sue him in a court of law. The court will say, “No, he cannot touch it; this is her property.” The property and rights of women are completely protected by law.

The husbands of these poor labouring women you see in the villages do not know where their wives keep the ornaments. In Indian villages, the family home has only one room, fifteen by fifteen or ten by ten, but the husband does not know where the gold is hidden. The wife goes out daily

to till the land or to labour somewhere because she is from a very poor family. However, her mother-in-law remains at home all day, like a watchdog; she never goes out. So, the mother-in-law has a very secure place in the family because the daughter-in-law needs her to look after the wealth, the ornaments and jewels, in her absence, so that the husband does not dig them up and run away.

In rural areas, the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law get on very well, which is not the case in urban society. If the husband is given to drinking or womanizing, he could dig up the whole room while the wife goes out to work. He would easily find out where the wealth is kept and run away with it but for the mother-in-law who is there all the time on guard, like an Alsatian. This is the secret of our society, which is called *streedhanam*. So, in India, there are two types of wealth – national and personal. Every family will have at least ten to one hundred grams of gold. Those families which are better off will have from one to ten kilograms, and some families may have fifteen to twenty kilograms of gold.

The government does not know and cannot know about this wealth. If the government encroaches upon women's personal wealth, it will fall. It will not come to power next time. No government and no man can touch a woman's wealth. She is the sole administrator of this wealth. In 1962, there was an Indo-Chinese conflict. Indian and Chinese military forces gathered on the borders. At that time of national crisis, women came forward with large numbers of personal gold bangles, earrings and nose rings, which they gave to the government. They said, "Go and fight and protect our borders." Therefore, never misunderstand the power, position and capacity of an Indian woman. If the woman is such a powerful person in society, she has to be looked after.

Swami Niranjan: You may wonder why Sri Swamiji is giving these good luck kits. It is not because he wants to make the family rich by giving them ornaments, jewels and nice things. It is to help nurture and sustain society for times to come.

Sri Swamiji: A few days ago, a girl of fifteen was leaving and I asked her, “If I were to give you something, what would you choose?” She replied, “Something made out of gold.” That girl was so poor that her clothes were in tatters. Her family had not eaten for three days, and she was dreaming of gold! Here the women dream of gold, and why not? For they are the treasurers of society.

Swami Niranjan: So, in conclusion, if you want to help a nation, a culture or humanity, make sure that you look after womankind.

Satsang 10

November 29, 1997, Afternoon

Please tell us what happens to the soul after death?

In answer to this question I will discuss two reports on death, one within the range of my personal experience and the second from an article in the *Readers Digest*, which I happened to read about thirty years ago. In the *Readers Digest* report, Mr A., a man with a long flowing beard, died in Azerbaijan, but he came back to life again before he could be cremated. However, he no longer spoke the language of Azerbaijan, instead he spoke Portuguese. The people of his locality could not understand him, so the authorities put him into a mental asylum for treatment. At the same time, in a remote village somewhere in Brazil, another man died, Mr B., who did not have a long flowing beard. He too came back to life, but was no longer speaking Portuguese; he was speaking another language. Mr B. was not put in a mental hospital because Brazil was not an advanced country. The people there thought that perhaps some spirit of the jungle or hills had entered him. So they performed all kinds of exorcisms on him, but he still spoke only Russian, not Portuguese.

In Azerbaijan, Mr A.'s doctor thought that maybe a transfer of souls had taken place. He often read the newspaper to gather information about his profession. Within a year or two, he found a report that a man who had

died somewhere in a remote village in Brazil had come back to life again, speaking Russian. So, he took his patient to Brazil and went to the village where the Russian-speaking man was living. As soon as the two men saw each other, one said, "I'm him, I'm him," and the other said, "He's me, he's me." These two men exchanged souls; the Portuguese became a Portuguese and the Russian became a Russian. So, there is something called soul which can go from one body to another, from one place to another, even from Azerbaijan to Brazil.

The second report was from India. In 1945, a three-year-old girl named Shanti Devi and her parents were in Mathura, the birthplace of Sri Krishna, on a pilgrimage. As they were passing a house, Shanti Devi said, "This is my house, this is my house!" She was a small child so her parents said, "What nonsense!" But she refused to budge and said, "This is my house; I live here." Eventually, they decided to enter the house and found that the child instantly recognized the people there as her past husband and in-laws. Not only that, she also recognized the place where the money and jewellery were kept, which is the most secret occupation of Indian ladies! The head of that family was terrified and said, "What is this mischief? These people come into my house with a small child who identifies us as her husband and-in-laws from a previous life, and now she is telling everyone where the jewellery is kept. Are they trying to grab my riches?" So, he filed a lawsuit in the court, thinking that they were up to something.

The court summoned both the applicant and defendants: Shanti Devi, her parents and the head of the family. Now, the question was what should the judge decide, because there was no evidence of a soul migrating from one body to another. So, the judge brought this case before a commission, consisting of three great Indian sadhus. One was Swami Ramdas from South India, who is no more. Another was my guru, Swami Sivananda, and the third was another great sannyasin. Ultimately, the judge had to pronounce

his decision on the testimony and evidence of these three renowned saints. His judgement was that the soul could migrate from one body to another, but that soul has no right over the property of its previous incarnation.

Survival after death

In India, such issues have been discussed from the beginning of civilization, not only for a few centuries. One question has always puzzled the people of this country: whether there is survival after death. There are people who say, “No, you die and that’s it; the book is finished there.” We have that philosophy in India as well. However, when the scholars and wise men began to discuss and define destiny, they found that many other issues of life were included within the destiny of men and women, such as karma, action and reaction, good and bad, right and wrong, pure and impure. Why should you be pure? Why should you be good? Why should you be celibate? Why shouldn’t you commit violence? Why shouldn’t you steal? Why shouldn’t you murder somebody? The answers to these confounding questions began to change because this philosophy of non-survival after death was challenged. They said, “If nothing survives after death, if there is no permanent entity like the soul, then why be good? Kill, beg, borrow and steal, do whatever you like and live well.”

There are four Vedas: *Rig Veda*, *Yajur Veda*, *Sama Veda*, and *Atharva Veda*, which were written during ancient periods of history. There are one hundred and eight Upanishads in Sanskrit, which were written in later periods. There are also the Puranas written during different eras, narrating stories on these topics and many others as well. So, this question was answered over millennia. Ultimately, the wise men, the sages in this country came to the conclusion that the body is the vehicle. It is constituted of five elements: ether, air, fire, water and earth, and is interrelated with the three gunas: sattwa, rajas and tamas. This body is the creation of a natural process. Not only this human body, but all the mineral, vegetable and animal bodies, the micro and macrocosmic

bodies, the suns and stars. The content of their existence is also the five tattwas, interrelated with the three gunas. This topic was dealt with in detail in the philosophy of Samkhya, one of the six philosophies in India. Samkhya tells us what the five tattwas are, how quintiplication takes place and how the combination of these five elements becomes this immense universe. That is the theory regarding the body or matter, but the body is the creation of nature.

According to Samkhya, nature has no intelligence, it is inert. For example, I am speaking through this microphone and you are listening. It is not the microphone which is speaking, but you are able to hear me because of the microphone. Likewise, prakriti is inert, *jada*, and purusha is consciousness, *chetana*. When purusha and prakriti, consciousness and matter, join together, then birth, creation or manifestation takes place. You become a human being. At the time of death, the gross body begins to decay, but the subtle body still exists and is carried by the causal body into shoonya. The soul becomes invisible, just like the microwaves which you cannot see. It is still invisible in you and me. You cannot see my soul and I cannot see yours. Nobody can see anybody's soul. Even I cannot see my soul, I can only feel that 'I am'. Who is this 'I'? You say, "I am because I am. I experience myself." But do you see yourself? Are you sure of what you mean by this 'I'? No, you are not.

The individual *atma*, self or spirit, is known as *jivatma*, which is the self or spirit with karmas to fulfil, with inherent desires. For the *jivatma*, death is the beginning of a night. In the evening of life, he dies and the dark night begins. Then again there is morning, when he comes back into the mother's womb. With what does he come back? He returns with the plans that he made yesterday, exactly the same as we do every morning. In the evening we think, "Tomorrow I have to go to Calcutta, Bangalore, Sydney, Melbourne or Paris," and then we sleep. Next morning we get up. What do we do? Do we forget our plans of travelling to France, Australia or Bangalore? No, we try to fulfil them.

The desires and passions are all stored in the subtle body, which is like a small microchip. The data stored there is exact and precise. For example, twenty years ago I saw you in Delhi and today I still recognize you. This is possible because twenty years ago I registered you in my subtle body. Today I refer to that impression and say, “Yes, you are the same person whom I met twenty years ago.” That process is called memory. The soul has a memory. After death, when the soul leaves the body and lives in ethereal space, it searches for an opportunity to fulfil the desires experienced at the time of death. This is the conclusive statement made by the great acharyas. You may have many desires, plans and ambitions in your life, but when you depart from this body at the time of death, there will be one predominant thought, either of food, wife, children, money, or maybe of God.

Final thought is the guide

How nice it would be if our last thought was, “If I had been a renunciate, I would be living in a mountain cave now. I would be meditating on God, without interacting with anybody.” This is precisely why, in the evening of my life, I left Munger and came here to Rikhia. Now I pray all the time, “Oh God, may no doctor or nurse attend me when I die. I do not want a drip or a bedpan. I do not want to see my disciples crying for me. Let there be just one image in my mind of Lord Shiva, besmeared with ashes and adorned with matted locks, crescent moon and serpents, and with the third eye closed, of course.” This is my sankalpa – that I should see his form at the time of death. I did not come here to start an institution, to become a great man or to fulfil any other ambitions. Whatever I do here is because I have been told to do it by somebody whom you don’t know, whom I have never seen and whose phone number I don’t have. He has asked me to do it.

So, at the time of death, the last thought becomes the guiding principle for your next birth. In this life you may be a wretched person, hopeless in every sense, but during

the last moments before your departure, you may think of very high spiritual things. This is nearly impossible, but if it happens, your next birth will be directed by that last thought. You will incarnate according to that last thought in your previous life. However, all the other karmas of your previous life will also follow you into that incarnation, even with that great sankalpa. You may be a good person, but there will also be suffering because you have to suffer, you have to enjoy, you have to face and confront the karma. You can escape anything in life, you can cheat God in every sense, but you cannot cheat your karma, because karma is within you. The witness, that watchdog within you, is there all the time, making notes in his computer. Everything is being computerized.

Therefore, this matter of transmigration, relating to the journey of the soul from ignorance to light, from mortality to immortality, should be understood in the light of karma, in the light of the nature of the soul. At the same time, you should remember one point. The wise men in India, regardless of their tradition, whether they were from the north, south, east or west, were inspired by the philosophy, by the approach, but they were never satisfied with the final answer because the final answer is with God, not with man. We have to be open-minded all the time. So, the wise men, whether Shankaracharya or any other great saint, have explained very clearly how the soul moves from one body into another. Even as we throw off these clothes and put on new ones, the individual soul leaves one body and enters another. However, no matter which body it adopts, the soul has to face and experience the karma that it has reaped. This is an eternal process until the day we are emancipated.

Is it possible to purify oneself from lokeshana, dareshana and vitteshana, by performing selfless service?

Why waste time fighting with *lokeshana*, *dareshana* and *vitteshana*? We all have these desires for recognition, sensual enjoyment and security. I did not desire a child, but ended

up making a disciple. Did it make a difference? I did not desire wealth, but wealth came. The best philosophy is that, whatever a human being possesses, a large portion of it should be spent on others, meaning the needy, helpless, handicapped, blind, lame and orphaned. Even a blind or lame person has desires. A leper has desires. You are only worried about your own desires. Do you ever worry about the desires of others? When you begin to worry about others, the pressure of your own desires will be lessened.

You don't have to do anything about your own desires when you think about others. A man is lying by the side of the road. He is old and begs from anybody who passes by. There is a small aluminium bowl beside him. Flies flit about him. He is very thin, frail and weak. Doesn't this man have desires? Have you ever thought about it? Even though a man is incapable of fulfilling his sensual desires, does he not want to fulfil them? Have you ever thought about him? You sit there and talk big! A man who cannot digest still dreams of enjoying good food. The weakest, most diseased person still thinks of sensory enjoyment.

Let me tell you something from my personal experience of begging, which I did for four to five years. When I sat on the ghat to beg for the first time, the beggar next to me said, "Move away from here. You are not from our community of beggars. Go and find another place." They made me move because they knew I was not a beggar. I was a sannyasin living as a beggar for the experience, although I could have easily eaten in an ashram for free. There are plenty of ashrams in Varanasi; nobody starves to death there. I went to beg for the experience, but the other beggars were not there just for the experience. Begging was a vritti for them. I looked around and saw people who were without an arm, without a leg, lame, diseased and penniless, dreaming of becoming the prime minister! As I heard these helpless, weak, handicapped people talk, I realized they had so many desires.

I am only giving this example to illustrate the point that *trishna*, craving, exists in each and every being. The only

difference is that humans know and other creatures do not. So, if you want liberation, educate a poor child, help the lame to walk. Spend one or two thousand rupees on a blind man so that he can have his eyes operated on. Maybe he can regain his sight. Pick up a leper from the street and find a house for him. Helping others is the easiest way to liberate oneself. Serving others is the easiest way to free oneself from bondage.

Could you explain the similarities between Vedic Dharma and the teachings of Christ?

The question is very classical and academic, yet I can give you a simple answer. Compare the road between Calcutta and Deoghar to the road from Delhi to Deoghar. If you want to reach Deoghar, there are many roads, not just one. If you want to come to Deoghar from Calcutta, you don't have to fly to Delhi first and then come here. If people want to come here from Australia, they don't have to fly to London. The destination is one but there are many paths to reach it. Each individual must have his own way according to his taste and temperament, intelligence and limitations. I have my path and Swami Niranjan has his. Our paths can't be the same, although we belong to the same order, sect and religion.

You are asking this question in the context of God. Your relation to God is direct and not through me. You may need my guidance and inspiration, and I may be able to help you a little bit, but your way to God is your own personal path. If I asked you to go my way, I would create more trouble for you. So, there is no question of comparison between religions. Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism and Zoroastrianism are all broad paths, not narrow ones. You do not follow dogma on broad paths, only inspiration and certain basic directions. My mantra is that of Shiva, but my ishta deva is Rama. I have chosen Shiva to reach Rama because Shiva is the ultimate devotee of Rama. Last year we held Rama Naam Aradhana. This year it is the wedding of Sita. So, to attain Godhood, to awaken the divine element in

oneself, each individual will have to find his or her own way. No other person can get moksha for you.

You have to find the way for yourself. I have not come here to tell you the way. I have come to find a way for myself. While I was in Munger, I told people whatever I knew, but if you really want to find your way, you will have to search yourself. I cannot show you the light. My entire focus now is on what I can do for those who are sad, destitute and helpless. What can you do for them? What can society do for them? This is the easiest way to meet, recognize, experience and know God. No other way is easier than thinking about those who are not your own and serving them with body, heart and wealth. If a man is shivering with cold, give him a blanket. This is a very big sadhana. If you don't have a blanket, give him a sack. If you do not have this sensitivity, if you do not feel the pain and misery of others, then don't talk to me. You are useless. You only know how to talk about knowledge.

When your son falls sick, you run helter-skelter and pay the doctor any fee he asks to cure him, but do you have the same sensitivity or sympathy for somebody else? If you do, then come to me. Sit down with me like a rishi from the Upanishads and I will give you knowledge and, if possible, shaktipat. Swami Satyananda has the grace to give shaktipat, but not for selfish people like you. Your son, wife and family are foremost for you; the rest of the world is out of your fold. When others suffer, it never really moves you. The biggest thing in life is sensitivity in the form of compassion, love and affection. The prana is softened with bhakti and daya. The divine light of God descends in meditation, dreams and the waking state through this tenderness. When you want divine grace, it can descend upon you. But your love, affection, sympathy and devotion are limited to your own kith and kin. There is lip service, just jabbering, for everyone else.

You asked a question and I have answered it, but through this I am telling everybody to become a bit more sensitive. Think a little about others too. Step out of your

selfish boundaries. Right now, you only have to think about humans, but maybe, one day, you will have to think about animals too, because even animals experience grief. When you eat chicken, the daughter of a hen dies. When you eat mutton, the son of a goat dies. Do you ever think about this? If we killed your son and ate him, how would you feel? Maybe, if you relate your own grief and pain to that of animals, you would give up eating them.

Cosmic Mass

Tomorrow a Cosmic Mass will be celebrated here according to the principles of the Christian religion. This is an auspicious moment of happiness in Rikhia, as history is being made. It is probably the first time in the history of Vedic religion, of Christianity and of India that such an event has taken place. A Christian minister and priests representing the Independent Church of Australia have agreed to hold a mass on the same platform as the Vedic religion, along with pictures of Indian gods and goddesses. I will be a co-celebrant in that mass and will assist in giving communion. Each one of you who understands the meaning behind these words should attend. Unity, compromise and understanding between religions cannot be achieved by politics.

At one time, Lord Shiva recited the *Ramacharitamanas* and told the Vaishnavites, “This is being narrated by Lord Shiva.” When the Shaivites learned that their lord was narrating the story of Rama, both sects made friends and the battle ended. Shankaracharya did the same. He was a Shaivite himself, but he went to Badrinath and established the image of Narayana. Ever since, the Shaivites there have worshipped Lord Vishnu. It is like a Muslim going to a Shiva temple and reciting the Rudri text because, at one time, the animosity between Shaivites and Vaishnavites was as bitter as that between Hindus and Muslims today. Each of these religions had always said, “This is the only way,” but today they say, “This is also the way.” Previously it was ‘only’, now it is ‘also’.

So, this is an historical event for Rikhia because tomorrow a minister of the Christian faith is coming to Sita's wedding. On the one hand, the marriage ceremonies will go on and, on the other, there will be prayers and blessings. I will give them diksha so that followers of that faith and this one embrace one another and end the fighting over religion forever. There is no need to convert from one religion to another. What difference does it make if you read the Bible or the *Gita*? While travelling by train, one person may go first class, another second class and others may go without tickets, but everybody arrives at the same destination. So, whether we follow the Vedic, Muslim, Christian or agnostic path, all ways go towards God. There is no other destination. It is one way traffic.

Satsang 11

November 30, 1997, Morning

What is guru? What is discipleship? What is the relationship between guru and disciple whether they be householders or sannyasins? How does guru perform the greatest of all operations on the disciple, known as egodectomy?

Sometimes the operation fails! Bihar School of Yoga has published a book on the guru-disciple relationship, written by Swami Satyasangananda when she was in Australia. Of course, I was the guiding factor. At the age of eighteen I accidentally confronted a tantric yogini in Nainital, Uttar Pradesh. At that time I had no knowledge of guru and disciple and no desire to be a sannyasin. I was just a young man, interested in cricket, football, hockey and my own studies. I had no exposure to this kind of spiritual life. I was also very arrogant, coming from a kshatriya family, and I thought I could do everything, but she tamed me.

She tamed me, not because she was a female, but because of her depth of knowledge in those subjects that I had read about in the literature of Swami Vivekananda and Swami Dayananda, and in the Bible. She was totally illiterate and very ugly. Her body was as fat as a buffalo's and absolutely black like charcoal. She always smelled foul because she never cleaned her teeth, took a bath or changed her clothes. Her language was obscene and she would abuse anyone at

the drop of a hat. But she spoke on tantra, kundalini and nadis. She explained what the darkness of ignorance is and what the stages of enlightenment are. She explained many things from many scriptures, although she was not aware that they were in the scriptures. Then she taught me tantra.

My family owned a large property, two thousand acres of land and forest, with cows, bulls, sheep, horses and ponies. I gave the yogini a place to live in our private forest. In those days private parties owned the forests in India. Every Saturday and Sunday, when I was free from school, I would visit her there. At the end of six months, she gave me shaktipat, anugraha. I had practically the same experiences as Kakabhushundi had when he entered Rama's mouth. When I read the account of Kakabhushundi's experience, I understood it. I had those experiences which Yashoda had when Krishna opened his mouth. So, when I read that portion of the Bhagavat, I understand it well. She gave me a transcendental experience, which was beyond mind, body, senses and all categories of definition. We call it shaktipat.

The light is within

Shaktipat is the transmission of spiritual energy, but she didn't call it shaktipat, she called it anugraha. *Anugraha* is grace, an experience transmitted from guru to disciple. I then asked her to initiate me into discipleship and become my guru. She said, "No, I won't be your guru. I have transmitted my energy to you, but the experience you have had is not yours, it is just a glimpse. You will have to work out how to attain it for yourself, by correcting your lifestyle, your karma, your vehicle. You will have to develop to such an extent that this experience will come from within you. I am pushing it into you now. It is my energy that I have transmitted to you, but you will not experience it without me. Now try to develop it without me." When I asked her how I could do that, she replied, "Find a guru," and then she went away. My spiritual journey began from that time and it continues to this date, from 1944 to 1997.

Now I am seventy-five and I think she was twenty years older. She used to live in a village somewhere near Uttarakashi. She died only a few years ago at the age of ninety or ninety-five. I am still a traveller, but now I am close to the destination, not too far away. I can glimpse a little bit of it. However, at that time I was in search of a guru, so I left my home and family. I did not really know what a guru was, whether he was a teacher who instructs, a master who orders, a companion who helps, or a magician who creates illusion in the mind. Who is a guru and what should I expect from him? Should I expect him to touch my forehead and fill me with transcendental experiences, like Kakabhushundi or Yashoda? No, the guru does not do that.

You have to grow spiritually to such an extent that the experience is revealed and expressed from within you, as a result of your spiritual attainment. You have to clean the mirror and purify your heart; you have to do so many things. Ultimately, the experience is in you. Even now, it is in you – the spiritual experience, divine experience, cosmic experience, universal experience, expansion of consciousness or whatever name you may call it. It has more than one hundred and fifty names. Whatever you call that experience, it is transcendental. It is not obtained through the mind, senses or any material instruments. When the mind goes out, the senses and the body are also out, Swami Satyananda is out. This consciousness is out in totality. Then a new consciousness is born. At that time this experience takes place, and it is not an experience that guru imposes on you. This experience is yours, it is you, it is within you – the light.

You believe that the guru will touch you and the light will shine forth, but the guru will never do that. You have to qualify for it. Only then will the guru give you a little glimpse to show you exactly what it is you have to attain. I rejected all the experiences I had had in the past thirty, forty, fifty or sixty years. I said, “No, that is not the experience.” The inner space is uncharted. It is immense, nothing but expansion. It has no end anywhere! You could have not one but millions of

experiences which are true experiences. But someone has to give that to you, and she gave it to me. She alerted me and said, “Now you have to work hard and attain this for yourself.”

Journey to my guru

So, I went out to hunt for a guru. First I went to Gujarat, where I had an adopted sister. She put me on to a teacher, a mahatma, a saint, who was very happy to have me. He was old and thought that as I was young, educated, energetic and promising, I would be able to look after his ashram. The day I realized that, I left, saying, “I did not come here to acquire an ashram,” because I was rich myself. I had a thousand acres of agricultural land, fifteen acres of forest, fifty to sixty servants. What did I care for that ashram? One night I scaled the walls and went to Bareilly in Uttar Pradesh.

From Bareilly, I went into a somnambulant state. I cannot remember what I did, how or why I purchased the ticket or on which train I travelled. My mind was an absolute blank. I do not remember anything about that time, although I have tried very hard to remember. I do not remember the all night journey from Bareilly to Buxar. Then suddenly my consciousness opened to the external world and I found that I was sitting on a train right in front of a sannyasin with matted locks, who was smoking. I had not smoked for many days, so I asked him to give me a cigarette. He replied, “Oh, don’t smoke, young boy, or you will get TB.” Then he asked me where I was going. I replied simply, “I am searching for a guru.” “Where,” he asked, “in a shop?” I said, “No,” and when he asked me who had told me to come here, I replied, “I don’t know.”

He took me to Rishikesh and deposited me at Kalikamliwala Dharamshala Kshetra. In the morning, a worker in that institution came to talk to me because he had heard that a young man had arrived from Kumaon, where he was from. I told him I was searching for a guru, so he sent me to Swami Vishnudevananda of Kailash Ashram, the headquarters of our Akhara. Swami Vishnudevananda told me, “First you must be

initiated by someone, then you can come here. We don't give sannyasa, but we keep sannyasins and teach them Sanskrit and the shastras." I asked him where I had to go. He replied, "Go to Swami Sivananda, he is very brilliant."

On 19th April 1943, I met Swami Sivananda at nine o'clock in the morning. I told him, "I want to live with you." I didn't say, "I am in search of a guru." He said, "Yes, you can stay here, but you will have to work hard physically, mentally and spiritually, no laziness or low energy, just hard work." He became my guru. I didn't say to him, "You are my guru." He didn't say to me, "You are my disciple." That bond which was formed on 19th April 1943 continues to this day, even though he is no longer in the body. That bond is so strong that when he departed from his physical body in the middle of the night, I knew that he had gone. At that time I was living as a parivrajaka and happened to be staying in Munger at Ananda Bhavan, the guesthouse of Mr Goenka.

Egodectomy

The word *guru* means 'one who dispels the darkness in life'. Teacher and guide are just simple definitions, but a complete and total definition of guru is one who helps you to dispel the dirt, to remove the darkness within. Disciple comes from the word 'discipline', but in Sanskrit we say *shishya*, which means 'one who has come to learn'. The relationship between guru and shishya is a very important one. There are relationships between husband and wife, brother and sister, mother and daughter, and so on, but the guru and disciple relationship is not physical, it is spiritual. Guru and disciple do not have physical relationships. To some extent, for some time, it can be mental, but otherwise it is purely emotional and spiritual. It is concerned with bhakti and knowledge. That was the relationship between Arjuna and Krishna, Hanuman and Sri Rama, and Swami Vivekananda and Ramakrishna Paramahansa.

A disciple is not a servant and a guru is not a commander. The guru creates conditions so that the disciple may

purify himself. The most difficult thing in life is purification of the consciousness, the atma, the self. At present, you do not know what consciousness is or what the faults within you are. You try to correct your social and mental faults, but there are faults embedded deep within your personality. Therefore, the guru often performs an operation on the disciple, which is not tonsillectomy but egodectomy, the removal of ego. This operation on the ego is so difficult that many disciples cannot bear it. However, if it succeeds, then they reach the goal. So, a disciple must have certain cardinal qualities, like devotion to the guru and an innocent personality. Before guru you are not an intellectual, not intelligent, you are like a child in your mother's lap. While serving your guru, you are not serving him as a servant, but as a disciple. Service, devotion, innocence and faith are the four very important cardinal principles in the life of a disciple.

The example of Milarepa

You may have read or heard of Tibet's great yogi, Milarepa. It is just a simple example that comes to mind while talking about guru and disciple. Milarepa was a boy in Tibet. His guru, Marpa, was a graduate of Nalanda, which was a Buddhist University of the Hinayana sect, situated in south Bihar between Rajgir, Gaya and Patna. When Marpa returned to Tibet, Milarepa approached him. Marpa said, "You are a rascal, a stupid idiot, and you want to become a disciple? You are worthless. Why should I keep you? You are not even as good as my dog. Get out!" This was the first welcome Marpa gave to his disciple. Now, when a disciple comes, the guru is very happy, but the guru should not think like that because his role has a very great responsibility.

Even though Milarepa was unwelcome, he was determined to stay near his guru, so he said, "I am not leaving, sir." Marpa tried to send him away, but Milarepa refused to go. Finally Marpa said, "Okay then, stay here on the doorstep." So Milarepa slept outside on the doorstep. Whenever Marpa went out or returned, he would give Milarepa a kick,

shouting, “You rascal, you are sleeping in my way!” The guru Marpa used to keep meat for several days until it became hard and dry. When it was too hard to chew, he would give it to Milarepa. He was a guru worth having! And Milarepa still remained there; he didn’t leave.

Milarepa accepted that treatment from his guru because when you go to hospital for an egodectomy, why be afraid of the surgeon or the knife? Why be afraid of the operation? On the one hand, you want to be operated on and, on the other, you are afraid – “No, no, I don’t want a surgeon, I don’t want the knife.” When you become a disciple, you must be prepared for this operation because without it your ignorance will not go. It has to be operated on and the operation is always done with a knife. It is not performed with a rose or lotus flower. It has to be done with a very sharp instrument.

One day when Marpa went out, his wife brought fresh meat for Milarepa. She said, “Eat it, child, before he comes back.” Milarepa accepted it innocently. He didn’t know what was in her mind. He was innocent, like a child. Marpa’s wife began serving Milarepa and while he was eating, Marpa suddenly appeared. He shouted angrily, “Now I know what is transpiring between the two of you! Young boy, you are casting lascivious thoughts at my wife and she is helping you. From today you will no longer stay here. Get out! Go to that hill and stay there. Carry stones up the hill and make a hut. Don’t come back here!”

So, this young boy of fourteen or fifteen carried the stones one by one to the top of the hill and collected them there. Then Marpa told him to move the stones to another hill. Again Milarepa carried the stones. One day, after having moved all the stones, he was sleeping. Marpa appeared and said, “What are you doing, taking a little rest? You lazy boy, this is not the right place for you because you are sleeping all day. Take all the stones back down the hill.” If I had been a disciple of Marpa, I would have said, “Take them down yourself; I will not!” I would have thought, “What kind of a guru is he, a crazy man? First he tells me to take the stones

two kilometres up to the top of this hill and then he says to take them down. No, this guru is not worth it. He is not fit to be a guru!" But Milarepa was innocent and childlike. He was ready for the operation; he wanted to be on the operating table. So he started bringing all the stones back down again, one by one. Day after day, week after week, month after month, he carried the stones down, and you know how many stones are needed to build a house.

One day, when Milarepa was coming down the hill, he slipped and a big stone rolled down. Marpa saw the stone rolling and said, "What happened?" Milarepa replied, "Guruji, I slipped and the stone rolled away." Marpa said, "The stone rolled? Okay, so you roll too!" Then he gave Milarepa a kick that sent him rolling down the mountain. As Milarepa fell down the mountain, he became lighter and lighter like a flower, then he floated up like a balloon. So, he is called the 'flower yogi' of Tibet. That was an experience of anugraha his guru gave him. Marpa then gave him an instruction: "Find a cave located near water. Sit down in padmasana, the lotus pose. Place a clay lamp on your head and meditate." Milarepa followed this instruction. He didn't eat and he only drank water from the stream flowing nearby. Every morning he would take a bath and drink water.

Sincerity of the disciple

Such are the stories of disciples like Milarepa, Uddalaka Aruni and many others. However, it is very difficult to become a disciple. It is easier to call yourself a guru, and people accept it because there are many foolish people in this world who do not know the difference. If you purchase jewellery, you will find costume jewellery along with real jewels. There are costume gurus also. Mind you, gurus are born throughout history. Human society, whether north, south, east or west, is not devoid of gurus. Gurus and disciples have categories. Gurus like Ramakrishna Paramahansa or Sri Aurobindo have one type of disciple, then there are gurus in the villages and rural areas.

The guru-disciple relationship is a very deep subject and it is not possible to reveal everything about it. It also has to be seen from the point of view of the disciple's evolution, what he has achieved, what he is and what he wants. But one thing is certain – whether the disciple wants to attain siddhis, peace of mind, concentration and meditation or the quality of a guru, it is all up to him. If you are a sincere pilgrim on the spiritual path, you will definitely come across a guru as a matter of course, but gurus do not put up signboards, and many gurus live incognito.

When I left Rishikesh to live the life of a wandering monk or *parivrajaka*, after living with my guru for twelve years, I came across many other gurus. I met Dhuni Wala Dada in Madhya Pradesh, near Devaso. He used to maintain his *dhuni*, sadhana fire, all the time and abuse everybody, so that nobody would go near him. It is thought that if a sannyasin or a guru abuses people, he will be left alone, but still everybody would go to Dhuni Wala Dada. I also met Swami Nityananda Vajreswari, the guru of Paramahansa Muktananda. He used to throw stones at people so they would not come near him. He loved small children, but to all grownups like us he would say, “They’ve come to eat my rotis.” Such siddhas would throw stones at those who came to see them because they knew that gurus are very precious creatures and would be molested, so they were very careful to protect themselves.

Only one disciple

As far as I am concerned, I have only one disciple. After initiating many, I have only one disciple remaining. Others are on my computer list, but one lives with me and his name is Bholenath. He always thinks about me and I always think about him. He understands me completely, whether I speak in English, Hindi, German or Sanskrit, and he is very lucky. The day he arrived here the idea came to my mind that I should distribute clothes to all the people of my district, who number more than ten thousand. So, now I give to all of them.

Bhole came to me in strange circumstances, because I am not a dog lover. In my family I had ten Bhutia or Tibetan dogs and I hardly ever looked at them. Swami Niranjana is a dog lover; I am a God lover! He was given a little pup and he was very proud of it. In 1990, when I had just arrived in Rikhia, he brought it to show me. It was only a few months old then. That little pup was scratching from morning till evening and was very thin because he was only fed ashram food – rice, dal, rotis and khichari, not meat, his natural food. In the ashram in Munger they couldn't feed him meat because people of different faiths live in the ashram. Basically, all Indians regard meat as impure and if you start giving meat to a dog, people will not come to the ashram. So, I decided to keep the dog here with me.

When Swami Niranjana asked me what I would feed him, I replied, "I will do as I like; I don't care for anyone. If people don't come just because Swami Satyananda allows meat to be cooked in his ashram, I will be the happiest of people because I don't need anyone at all." I am speaking very frankly. A devotee opened an account for Bhole's meat. I am not afraid to tell you that I cook it myself. There is nothing secret in my life. Whatever I do, I can talk about openly because I am not afraid of anyone. I don't need anyone's appreciation because I am myself. You need me, but I don't need you, not even for donations, because the goddess of wealth has assured me, "Satyananda, as long as you do not live a life of luxury and selfishness, here is a blank cheque. Use it." And I do that. I don't need anyone's donations, gifts or anything else.

When this satsang is over, I will go and cook Bhole's food. He eats rice, a kilo of meat, a kilo of vegetables, a clove of garlic and one spoon of vegetable oil. He eats only once a day. He is a very lucky dog. His birthday and my birthday coincide. He is a Sagittarian. I am also a Sagittarian, one-pointed. Bhole is the one disciple who lives with me and for whom I care. He is the best of companions and he is loyal. He is very contented, very energetic, very deadly, but very kind and full of love. When I return to Ganesha Kutir, he

jumps around me with joy, asking, “Where were you?” He smells me all over and I tell him, “Don’t worry, I haven’t been touched by any disciple of your type.”

Is there a connection between Christianity and yoga?

The latter half of the twentieth century has seen the tremendous impact of the yoga movement throughout the world. Foreign visitors to India are drawn to yoga. In the past, at the time when Jesus visited India and lived here for twelve years, two spiritual disciplines were prevalent: one was Buddhism, a religion of ethics and morality, and the other was Vaishnavism, a religion of pure devotion. Jesus came under the influence of both these disciplines, and when he returned to his own country, he began preaching a new religion, which was a combination of Buddhist ethics and Vaishnava devotion.

Thus Christianity is a beautiful blend of good conduct and pure love. Apart from this, it has no deep philosophy, mysticism or intellectual quest. Unlike Adwaita Vedanta, there is no logic, cosmology or scientific discussion on the origin of the universe. Christianity is based on the simple belief and deep faith that God has created this world. It emphasizes ethics and morality, good social and personal conduct, and is full of do’s and don’ts. It is a religion of moral codes and right conduct. We also find many similarities between Christianity and the Vaishnava sects, which predominantly follow a line of pure love and devotion to God. Vaishnavism emphasizes complete surrender, prayer and egolessness. This is the path of *navadha* bhakti, the nine stages of bhakti.

In bhakti marga, it is also believed that Brahma creates the universe, Vishnu sustains it and Shiva destroys it. There are no other cosmological details. On the other hand, in Samkhya, Vedanta, Nyaya and Vaisheshika, there is scientific investigation into the origin of the universe and an intellectual, logical quest into the nature of the universe. Both the bhakti cults of India and Christianity believe that God created this world, along with all the sentient and insentient beings, the sky, the earth and the elements.

However, in the Christian world, during the last quarter of a century, science and technology have made tremendous progress in unprecedented strides. Higher education of the masses has led to an increase in material prosperity and affluence. It has engendered boundless and unlimited individual freedom of thought and action, complete freedom of choice in matters of personal belief, lifestyle, marriage, religion, faith and conduct.

During this period, the Christian world came into contact with Indian thought and religion and yoga was the agent, the medium. The West was initiated into Indian philosophy and religion by the yoga movement. Previously the West was completely ignorant of Indian philosophy and culture, except for a few highbrow intellectuals. Yoga introduced the western world to Indian philosophy and culture. Therefore, I thought it would be fitting to organize a Christian mass here. Last year, we organized the Shabad of the Sikh Panth, this year we will have a Christian mass. Maybe, next year we will have a Muslim prayer here, led by Muslim priests. But these things do not happen by force; man's heart should be open.

What is the definition of bhakti and what is its relevance in modern times?

There are many spiritual paths, many different approaches, but the destination is the same. Some paths are circuitous and others are straight. Some paths are like the inroads of ants and others are aerial shortcuts, like the flight paths of birds. But one path is the simplest and that is the path of bhakti. To direct your mind to God is bhakti, that's all. This is the simplest explanation. To direct your mind to the Lord, to the creator, to God, to the absolute self is bhakti. This is the basic definition. In the twenty-first century, which we are entering, the bhakti movement will take us by storm. Yoga was responsible for weaning people from the material to the transcendental world. It was the yoga movement that ushered in the spiritual awakening at large. Had yoga not been revived, humanity would never have turned to



*Invoking the weapon used for the sacrifice
at the end of Lalita Yajna*



Sri Swamiji sending off a lucky bride



Local village women attending the marriage ceremony of Sita



Sri Swamiji blessing the crowd

spirituality. Yoga has completed its mission successfully. Hatha yoga, asana, pranayama, mudra, bandha and other yogic practices proved extremely useful in bringing humanity to the path of bhakti. Yoga has become the pretext, the most practical excuse.

The next century, which all of you will be lucky enough to enter and live in, belongs to kirtan and bhakti. It will be full of samkirtan. The sound of samkirtan soirees will ring in the atmosphere. Renowned singers and musicians will step into kirtan singing, because the rasa, the joy and ecstasy, derived from devotional music cannot be found elsewhere. Two objectives will automatically be served in this way. First, the standard of music will improve. Music you detest, which was degraded into an obscenity, will be reformed on its own. Secondly, those who find the spiritual path very difficult will find it easy through bhakti. Therefore, those of you who can sing, and who have a family of sons and daughters, must sing kirtan. Dance, music and samkirtan will dominate the next century. There will be metropolitan samkirtan, cruise samkirtan, forest samkirtan, mountain samkirtan and, of course, temple samkirtan.

In bygone centuries we had a thousand forms of samkirtan, but those were unfortunately lost before your generation. The singing of God's name is a science which this country has perfected over thousands of years. There are many ways of singing the names of God. How will you sing God's name when you are travelling by boat? What type of kirtan do you sing when you are in a forest or on a mountaintop? How do you sing God's name when you are in a temple or in a church? There are many ways of singing. The pioneers of samkirtan in this country were Mira Bai, Sant Haridas and Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. Many great saints have laid special emphasis on singing God's name in rhythm. The kirtans you are singing are the names of God repeated in different ways. The style of singing kirtan differs according to the time of day. All this will emerge in the course of time because you are entering the twenty-first century.

The twenty-first century will be the century of bhakti yoga, not raja yoga or hatha yoga. And what is bhakti yoga? What is bhakti? Direct your mind to God. Sing his name, hear his name, write his name, draw his picture, talk about him, live with people who talk about God. This will not only make you free from tension, high blood pressure and so on, it will make you immensely happy, a kind of happiness that you cannot imagine, which cannot come from anything else in this world. The point of singing God's name is divine intoxication, divine ecstasy. *Harinaam ka pyala peekar aur pilakar ban ja tu matawala* – “Drink the glass of wine filled with God's name yourself and serve it to others and become ecstatic. Let there be divine intoxication everywhere.” Therefore, prepare your children for kirtan and bhakti. Prepare the young stars for bhakti yoga.

When I was a child, parents aspired for their children to be inspectors and lawyers. The parents of your generation wish to make their children into doctors and engineers. But in the next generation, parents will vie with one another to make their children into the topmost samkirtan singers. These bhakti singers will go places and earn honour and respect. Today's famous singers, such as Jalota, Pandit Jasraj, V.G. Jog and others, are not within the reach of ordinary people. Only big organizations and institutes can afford to invite them to perform.

Now prepare to groom the would-be singers for high rank. Then you will see your music, dance, performing arts, drama and plays all regain quality and class. Criticizing the present art and film scenario will not help, you have to take remedial action. Begin by making good music in your homes. Start with Sa, Re, Ga, Ma and a hymn to Sri Ganesha. Just as this morning we spent forty beautiful minutes singing God's praises, gather the family members together at least once a week for an hour or so and sing in praise of God.

These days the family is scattered during the day. Members of the same family do not even meet one another every day. Let kirtan bring all of you together and knit the

family into one unit of divine worship. If it is not possible to come together every day, meet at least once a week. If even once a week is not possible, then meet at least once a month. Choose the full moon day for this auspicious program.

We practise this program of kirtan and *Ramayana* at the Akhara for forty minutes every morning. First I play my damaru at four a.m., then the prayers begin in Christ Kutir. We read the *Ramayana* in the presence of Christ. Could you ever have conceived of a time when you would read the Bible in a temple, the *Ramayana* in Christ Kutir, and the Bible in a Muslim mosque? If it ever comes true, Oh God, how nice this Earth will be! Why do you say that the Bible is only for Christians and the Koran is only for Muslims? That creates compartments! It is like closing the door on someone. The Pacific Ocean meets with the Atlantic, the Atlantic with the Indian, the Indian with the Persian Gulf, and all oceans are one and the same. There is no difference, no partition.

I used to recite the *Ramayana* in Christ Kutir during the rainy season. Now others are chanting the *Ramayana* in front of Jesus. Only one who has a pure heart can do that. Do any of you have that purity of heart? You insist on eating rasagullas and reject pedhas. But why? Both are made of milk. I don't care, but you pick fights and create differences.

Satsang 12

November 30, 1997, Afternoon

We come across many different paths, all of which claim to be the path to spiritual enlightenment. This creates much confusion in our minds. What can we do to clarify this confusion, to imbibe the true spiritual teachings and to progress on the spiritual path?

I do not give spiritual lessons or spiritual guidance. I have never claimed, and I do not claim, that I can show you the path. I can, of course, tell you what has happened to me in the last sixty years or so. The questioner seems very confused. The question he has asked is, “Why are there so many roads to Delhi?”

The roads have nothing to do with the ultimate destination, they have to do with the traveller and his starting point. The roads that terminate in Delhi have nothing to do with Delhi; the important thing is where the person lives. Maybe he is from Deoghar or Madras, maybe from Ahmedabad or Moscow. If you have to go to Delhi, you do not have to know where Delhi is, first you have to know where you are. If you are in Bangalore, then you are not in Calcutta, Pune or Bombay. You are in Bangalore and, therefore, you have to think about how to travel from Bangalore to Delhi. It is Bangalore which is important. In other words, rather than looking for the destination or the path, you have to examine where you are now or to which category you belong.

Five categories of mind

Broadly speaking, spiritual aspirants belong to five categories. First come the idiots, the blockheads, the inert and the unapproachable. It is very hard to get into them. This is the lowest category, *moodha*. The second category is scattered, broken and dissipated. Their desires, passions, aims, accomplishments, actions, expressions, personality, choices, likes, hatreds and prejudices are all dissipated. They do not stick to one thing. Sometimes they want to become a film star, sometimes they want to become a cricketer like Kapil Dev, sometimes a tennis star like Navratilova, sometimes they want to become Indira Gandhi. Sometimes they want to practise kundalini yoga, sometimes swara yoga. Sometimes they want to enter into jada samadhi, dig a pit, get in and stop their breath. They are called *kshipta*; they have dissipated, unstable minds, with no centres. That is also a category of mind in psychology.

The third category keeps on oscillating like a pendulum. However, although a pendulum oscillates, it has a centre where it stops. Your mind moves about here and there, but then you do pranayama. You think about kundalini, about tantra, about this or that, then realize what you are doing and return to pranayama. When your mind is oscillating, it is running here and there, but you can bring it back to the centre. It has a central point to which it can gravitate again and again, in spite of its oscillation. That is the third category of mind called *vikshipta*. These three are the very low categories of mind to which most of us belong: *moodha*, *kshipta* and *vikshipta*. This classification of mind is according to yoga, Samkhya, Vedanta and also modern psychology, which has described and defined the mind in its own terms. Find out which category you belong to.

The fourth category is *ekagra*, one-pointed. You may eat, you may drink, you may do anything, but the whole mind is focused on one job. You are always obsessed with one idea, your mind is settled on one point only. *Eka* means 'one', *agra* means 'in front of you'. The mind comes back again

and again to that one point. That is called *ekagrata*. In common language you can say it is a concentrated mind. I don't know if we can dare say that we belong to that category! Concentration is a higher state of mind.

There is a story about concentration that you may have heard during childhood. Guru Dronacharya was teaching archery to his disciples. He called them one by one and asked them all the same question: "Tell me what you see on the tree?" Duryodhana said, "I see the tree, the leaves, the twigs, the branches and a bird." Bhima said, "I can see the colour of the bird." Somebody else said, "I can see the bird on the branch of the tree." Then Dronacharya called Arjuna, the hero of the *Gita*, and asked him, "What do you see there?" Arjuna replied, "The small black spot, the eye of the bird." Dronacharya said, "Shoot it!" Arjuna shot and hit it. That was archery. If you have to shoot the eye of the bird, then you should focus the lens of your mind so it can only see that and not the tree, the twig, the branches or leaves, not even the bird, but only the eye. When you focus the lens of your mind, only one thing is visible, and that is *ekagrata*. *Eka* means only one. If you see the bird, the tree and the branches it is three, four or five. How can you say that to be aware of many is concentration?

The fifth state is *niruddha*, meaning 'under control'. Just as you step on the brakes to stop a car, in the same way to step on the brakes and stop the mind is known as *niruddha*. That is why in the *Yoga Sutras* Patanjali defines yoga as, *Yoga chitta vritti nirodhah*. *Nirodha* means blocking or stopping. It is the highest category.

Be honest with yourself

Therefore, in the practical side of spiritual life, you have to deal with the mind. In order to deal with the mind, you must know where you are starting from. If you suddenly begin practising kundalini yoga, you will fail. If you want to go to school, which class you join will depend on what you have studied previously. If you have not even passed primary class,

you cannot go to university. The lecturer will not be able to explain anything to you, nor will you be able to understand him. So there is no use practising kundalini yoga, swara yoga or other different yogas unless you have examined yourself completely, and in order to examine yourself you have to be honest.

You have never seen yourself. You can only see your face with the help of a reflecting medium, either a mirror or calm water. So, first you have to know who you are. Do not say, "I am atma, I am God, I am Brahman, I am immortal." Say, "I am a rascal," and find out if you are or not. Tulsidas has written, "Who can be a greater cheat or a more crooked, wicked rascal and degenerate than myself?" First accept yourself and find out who you are. There are many methods to do this, not just one. You need a mirror. A person who criticizes you is your mirror because he tells you something. He may be a broken mirror, but that doesn't matter. At least he can tell you what your complexion is, so never despise a critic.

Either way, a person should neither despise nor shun criticism. A culture should not despise critics. A nation, a committee, or a community of people should always appreciate criticism. Sometimes it is positive and at other times it is negative, but nevertheless criticism is a mirror. If your husband criticizes you, don't defend yourself, and if your wife tells you off, don't be aggressive. If you react, then later, when you are alone, think about what was said. Maybe she was right, maybe he was right. In spiritual life it is important never to underrate the criticism of others.

So how can you know yourself? By self-investigation and self-introspection, *atmachintan*, by cogitating about yourself, and *atmavichara*, thinking about yourself. You never do it. Instead you say, "Oh, I am great, I am the best person in the whole world. If I were Prime Minister I would have done this and that." I heard that from the mouth of a beggar once, when I was living in the beggars' huts in Benares. Now I remember how big man's ego is. How big is

man's ego? How unbreakable is the shell? It is like the castle of Tripurasura.

Three bodies of consciousness

Do you know the story about the castle of Tripurasura which Lord Shiva had to destroy? *Tri* means 'three', *pura* means 'citadel', *asura* means 'demon'. The story goes that the demon ruler of the three cities, Tripurasura, was very afraid of Shiva, so he secured himself by hiding in a city which was like a fort with several boundaries. First was a silver fort with silver boundaries, then golden boundaries and then steel boundaries. This concept of the demon of the three cities is metaphorical because Tripurasura also denotes the three bodies that we are made up of. I am not speaking in relation to matter, I am speaking in relation to consciousness. You have a gross body, which means there is consciousness of the gross body, a subtle body, which means there is consciousness of the subtle body, and a causal body, which means there is consciousness of the causal body.

If you close your eyes right now, you are aware of your body. This is consciousness of the physical body, *sthula sharira*, or the gross body, comprised of the five senses of action and the five senses of knowledge. Then comes the *sukshma sharira*, the subtle body, where the mind, consciousness, ego, manas, buddhi, chitta and ahamkara interact. You cannot see the subtle body, but you can feel it. You know that you have memory, that you can think, discriminate, recognize, identify, permute and combine. That mind is the *antah karana*, *antah* meaning 'internal' and *karana* meaning 'instrument'. This internal instrument is the *sukshma sharira*.

When you are awake, you are aware of time, space and object, but when you go to sleep at night, for six or eight hours, you are not at all aware; you are disconnected from it. The concept of time, space and object is not just philosophical, it is also a concept in modern nuclear physics. Time, space and object is the formula for nuclear explosions;

the scientific philosophy of time and space meeting at one point, which is the nucleus. That is why it is called the nuclear bomb. Just as you can explode the nucleus of matter if you know the formula, in the same way, you can also explode the nucleus of pure energy, which is the mind.

So, there comes a point when you are certainly there, but you are not aware of time, space and object, and there is the continuity of your existence from the point when you fall asleep until the point when you wake up. When I ask, "How did you sleep?" you reply, "Very well." How do you know you slept very well when you did not know anything? Just think about it. It means that you were aware at that time when you did not know anything. That awareness of non-knowledge is called *karana sharira*, the causal body, where consciousness operates at the fringe. There is minimum self-awareness. This causal body is composed of total tamoguna. So, you have awareness of three bodies, the gross, subtle and causal.

Now where do you start your sadhana? Well, where are you? Some people merely live in the gross body. I will give you an example. Many years ago when I was in Kuwait, I was invited to meet the editor of an important newspaper, who wanted to know what I was teaching. As he did not know anything about yoga, I began by telling him about concentration on the breath. He said, "But how do I concentrate on the breath?" I replied, "Breathe with awareness and you will find out." His thinking, knowledge and understanding were so gross that he could not understand what I was saying. His mind was such that he did not know what the breath was. He was an intellectual, an editor. So there are people who operate through the physical body and there are some people who operate through the causal body and the subtle body.

Those people who want to find the right sadhana should remember that it is not like getting a job, or starting a business and earning money, or like purchasing a washing machine or car. You may want to practise sadhana and achieve something, but spiritual life is entirely dependent

on God's grace, not on your personal effort. What I have said so far is just an introduction, but the final point is that spiritual life, divine life, yogic life is entirely and totally dependent on God's grace. You can keep on practising yoga, or rebirthing or whatever you like. There are many things you can do. Continue with it. It is a good occupation and pastime, but nothing will bring you close to him. It is good to have the desire to lead a spiritual life. I do not deny that to do something you have to make an effort, but ultimately, one day you will realize that we are dependent on God's grace.

Surrender to God

I came to realize we are dependent on grace after practising spiritual life, sannyasa life, for many years. I tried everything possible. Then, on 19th January 1983, I resigned from the institution. I said, "God, I am tired. I can't do anything more. I have always wanted to go very high in spiritual life. I wanted to attain this and that, but now I am tired." In September 1988, I left everything – the work, responsibilities, friends, disciples, money and everything that I could consider to be my accomplishments. I couldn't decide what to do. I went to Varanasi, then to Vindhyachal. I went to Maihar and then to Pashupatinath, I went to practically all the holy places in India. On 14th July 1989, I surrendered, laid down all my arms as a defeated soldier, but I wanted amnesty from God.

I went to Trayambakeshwar, thirty kilometres from Nasik, from where the Godavari emerges and flows eastward. There I acquired a small room in a *goshala*, a cow shed, and decided to stay there for the whole of Chaturmas, that is, for two months. I went to the temple because Lord Mrityunjaya, my ishta, is there. I have the ishta of Mrityunjaya Mahadev because it is to him I went in 1963, before coming to Munger. He gave me whatever I asked of him. I said, "I came to you in 1963 with a request. You fulfilled it. I gave you a promise and I am fulfilling it. Now tell me what to do and hereafter I promise I will do what you tell me. I will

not do anything on my own.” I sat down and gradually lost consciousness. There was a huge storm with lightning and thunder. This storm happened internally, not externally. I heard a very clear, shrill voice say, “Six hundred thousand twenty-one hundred times.” That’s all, nothing else.

I made a decision, “Satyananda, you are not operating on your own just because you know so many things. You know what tantra is, you know about Vedanta, you know all the sadhanas, all the practices. You know everything, but now only do what God says, and if he doesn’t say anything, don’t do anything! Eat, drink and be merry.” I made this final decision. I am the machine, you are the machine operator. I am the car, you are the driver. Drive me, whichever way you like. Oh Lord, Oh Mother, You may cast me into hell, I don’t mind. I accept it as your blessing. You may take me to heaven, whatever you like. I accept it, but you operate this machine, you drive this car.

So, what was the meaning of this shrill voice that came in the night? I knew it meant to repeat the mantra twenty-one thousand, six hundred times. Normally in one minute we breathe fifteen times. In one hour, with natural, spontaneous breathing, not pranayama, we all breathe nine hundred times. In twenty-four hours we breathe twenty-one thousand, six hundred times. So the instruction was clear. For twenty-four hours, don’t eat, don’t go to the toilet, don’t sleep, don’t yawn, only be aware of your natural breath. Don’t interfere with your breathing, just watch the natural breath for twenty-four hours. It was no joke and I realized it after coming here to Rikhia.

My program is very simple. I get up at three o’clock. I want to start my day in a beautiful way, so the first thing I do is light a candle or incense stick in front of Sri Ganesha and tell him, “God, I am starting the day.” The deities for Kali yuga are Ganesha and Kali. Sri Ganesha and Goddess Kali rule the Kali yuga. It is their age, all other gods and goddesses have receded into the past.

At Trayambakeshwar, I had a small mat, a little pressure stove, filtered water and a small cane stand. I didn’t eat

anything. I would get one litre of milk in the morning and that is all I had. I would boil it three times a day, in the morning, at midday and at night. Then I faced the problem of where to stay. Munger was my previous incarnation so I didn't want to go back there. I had been to Rishikesh, but found it had become too crowded. There was a cave in Gangotri, but to stay there would require a lot of money. I liked the Guru Shikhar in Mount Abu, but the problem there was no water, and a sannyasin must stay where there is water.

Then on September 8th 1989, at four a.m. the shrill voice came again, saying, "Chitaboomi," which means cremation ground. It was clear that I was to go to a cremation ground. Now in India, mythologically and historically, there are two cremation grounds. One is Varanasi, Benares, which is Shiva's *smashan bhoomi*. The other is this entire area of Deoghar, which in our scriptures is known as Sati's chitabhoomi. When the voice uttered the words, "Chitabhoomi," I also saw this place, the building, the trees, everything as clearly as on a television screen. On September 8th, Swami Sivananda's birthday, I described what I had seen to Swami Satsangi. She went to Rikhia on the 9th and on the 10th she was shown this land. The title was struck on the 12th, and on the 14th I received the news that the property had been purchased.

God's grace

Now, to know exactly what God means, you have to ask him. You have to pray to him, "God, show me the path and be kind enough to lead me onto it. I have no mental, physical or moral strength. Unless you bless me, I cannot even walk the seven kilometres from Rikhia to Deoghar." Now, if I cannot even negotiate my way between Deoghar and Rikhia, heaven seems very distant. I have realized now that my own efforts will not yield anything. It will only be adding ego to ego. And now I must know God. How do I surrender all my weapons? How do I surrender my ego? How do I become a zero? You just have to speak in this way. "I am nothing, You are everything.

I am just a motor car, I need a driver. I am a chariot with ten horses, I need a charioteer. I am a machine, I need a mechanic to operate me.” This is the only way! Ultimately I have realized that there is no use in saying, “Swamiji, I am so confused, there are many ways.” You are confused because you are full of rubbish, like a waste paper basket!

On September 21st, 1989 I came here to Rikhia and pitched my tent. Then I made a small *poorna kutir*, a grass hut, to live in. In 1990, on January 14th, I suddenly started doing japa. I didn’t know what was happening, but I went on doing it. I was not tired, I was not aware, I was not unconscious. When I became aware, it was evening. Ten or twelve hours had passed and I had not known what I was doing. The message was clear. So I made a sankalpa to do ten million eight hundred thousand rounds of japa before Chaturmas ended. It took me three hundred days and it was very difficult. At the end of that *purushcharana*, the shrill voice came again, “Take care of your neighbours as I have taken care of you.” It is practically the same as Christ’s message of “Love thy neighbour.” After coming to Rikhia I discovered my relationship with God. Now what I do should be God’s commandment.

You are just praying because your father prays, your mother prays, because everybody prays. I am not criticizing or saying not to do Jaya Jagadisha Hari. Do it, even mechanically. I am only pointing out the limitations. You have to discover your own relationship with him. You will realize one day that when you leave everything to God, particularly spiritual life, you will have great joy and satisfaction. It will be very easy for you to enjoy your life without any items of sense enjoyment.

I think I have said everything. There is nothing beyond that. The sum and substance of what I have said is that you were born through the grace of God, not through the grace of your father. You live by the grace of God. It is by the grace of God that you have started thinking about spiritual life, about how to improve the quality of your life in general. It

is through the grace of God that things happen in your life, both good and bad. Remember this! When a lot of money comes, we say, “God is very kind.” When a son is born, we say, “God is kind.” When a wish is fulfilled, “God is very kind.” But if somebody dies, we say, “Oh, God is punishing me.” If money is lost, we say, “Oh God, why?” At that time you should say, “God, thy will be done. I am dying and everybody is dying. Thy will be done. You may do what you like, give me luxuries, pleasures, prosperity, money, children. I will have it as thy grace, as thy prasad.” Or if there is tragedy everywhere, the business fails, the shop fails, you are sick, say, “You have given me sickness, it is thy prasad.” If it happens, it is only God’s prasad.

Suffering – the salt of life

What kind of people are we? We are unreasonable. We only want from God those things that we want. We don’t want what he wants. That is why everybody is unhappy. What is the grace of God? If you go to hospital to see a surgeon, do you want him to use a rose or a knife to operate with? Tulsidas has clearly said in his *Ramayana* that even though a mother loves her child, when an operation is necessary she will agree to it because it will cure the child and make him healthy. Suffering makes a man; enjoyment makes him weak. That is why all the saints suffered.

Christ suffered throughout his life. I don’t think he ever slept on a foam mattress! He must have slept on the floor with a rotten blanket. I don’t think he had a comb or used bath oil and shampoo. Christ could perform miracles, but why didn’t he do so on the cross? He had to suffer. You can say the same about many other saints. Analyze the life of Sri Rama, whom you call the incarnation of God, or Sitaji, whom millions of Indians consider to be the incarnation of the Goddess. Rama, an emperor’s son, lived in his guru’s ashram for twelve years, sleeping on the floor and tending the guru’s cattle. When he returned home, instead of a coronation, he was exiled to the forest. If your mother-in-

law threw you out of your home, how would you feel? Then, just one year before his period of exile was over, a powerful emperor kidnapped his wife. Is that not a tragedy?

Even these men with miraculous powers, who could control the elements, who could control destinies, suffered because suffering is the salt of life. Why didn't Rama change his own destiny? Why didn't Krishna change his own destiny? Krishna's life was out and out suffering. Before he was born he was on Kamsa's hit list and he faced many problems during his childhood. These great men were supposed to be prophets, sons of God or incarnations of God, yet they all suffered. Therefore, you must understand that suffering is the salt of life. "Suffering is the crucible into which nature throws a man whenever she wishes to mould him into a sublime superman."

Only when you enter the furnace can you become gold. Sorrow is not an enemy. Sorrow and suffering are my friends. Happiness comes to destroy me. I am telling you from the depth of my heart that spiritual seekers must understand that God is the only source. God is the only support. If he wants you to do sadhana, do it. If he wants you to enjoy life, enjoy it. If he wants you to suffer, suffer. Become his servant. You have no choice because a servant has no choice. After all, why did he send you here in human form? After evolving through so many incarnations, today you have become a human being. Yet, even after becoming a human being, you behave in the same way as an animal behaves.

Purpose of human evolution

What does an animal do? It eats and so do you, although of course from a plate. An animal sleeps and you also sleep, although of course in a cosy bed. An animal is insecure; you are also insecure, although of course you can lock the door. An animal has a sex life, you also have a sex life. Where is the difference? You behave exactly the same as an animal. *Ahara* (food), *nidra* (sleep), *bhaya* (fear) and *maithuna* (sex) are the four basic instincts common to both man and animals. There

is only one difference. Should I tell you the difference or can you work it out for yourself?

You may say we have a society, but animals also have a society. Fish, elephants, horses, foxes, ants and bees have solid social systems. They have rules and regulations. Many animals such as lions and tigers define the boundary of their territory by urinating around it. They have property rights. They have their own languages. Animals have names. When a dog meets another dog, he will first smell its anus because a dog's nametag is its anus. Although tigers may all look the same to us, research scholars say that no two tigers have the same stripes. Monkeys have a very solid social system. They have a system of marriage, rules for intercourse and a divorce system. Animals have everything. You don't know much about it because you are more interested in your own neighbours. So, how is man different from other animals when we can see they have these characteristics in common? Is there anything that makes him different? Find out what it is.

Satsang 13

December 1, 1997, Morning

How can an ordinary person know when he is becoming attuned to his ishta or whether he is tuning in with the guru?

This is a meaningless question. It is a waste of time asking, answering and listening to it. Why are you getting entangled in all this? I was born into an Ikshwaku family. My ishta is Sri Rama. I took *diksha*, initiation, in the Shaiva sect and was given the mantra Om Namah Shivaya, but I have not run into any trouble. I worship both Sri Rama and Sri Shiva. What difference does it make? After all, whether you take milk in the form of rasagulla or pedha, all you should care about is keeping your head in place, on your shoulders.

Maybe you are meditating on your ishta deva, but your guru doesn't come as the focus of your awareness. What difference does it make? After all, externally ishta deva and guru are only two different names, but internally they are one. The basic principle is atma: Ishwartattwa, atmatattwa, parabrahma, parameshwara, anadi, avinashi, abhokta, akarta, the one who is beyond name, form, place, speech and the sense perceptions. To attain that ultimate principle, you may worship the ishta or the guru, because they are not separate in essence, they are merely two different forms. The principle is one and the same, whether you attain the ishta or the guru. The point is how to focus the mind which is forever running after maya, the mind

that is so engrossed in worldly objects, the mind that is running after the shadow, the mirage. This fickle, capricious, covetous mind needs to be focused, to be applied somewhere to make it one-pointed. You need a prop to act as a focal point. The guru is necessary because he can act as a focal point.

Without formal admission, you cannot enter a college. Without the rituals of the wedding ceremony, you cannot be called man and wife. Even if you stay together day and night, you will be considered only as boyfriend and girlfriend, not as husband and wife, but the moment you go around the holy fire seven times and perform the marriage ritual, you will be accepted as husband and wife. Similarly, until you accept someone as your guru you cannot be called a sadhaka or a pupil. Unless and until you get a guide, a guru, you cannot be a traveller on the spiritual path.

You have not yet received the imprint of the guru; therefore, you need a guru. The guru shows you the path. He directs and guides you. The mantra that your guru gives you is the master key to all the locks of your life. Our spiritual masters, the supermen, tell us that far ahead on this path of sadhana, there comes a stage where only undivided awareness resides. Neither the ishta nor the guru survives. *Phutaa kumbha jala jala hi samaanaa*, which means that when the ego breaks, when this puny, petty earthen pot of 'I' shatters, the water inside the pitcher and the water outside become one. Therefore, there is no essential difference between you, me, the guru and the ishta.

In any science or field of knowledge, you need to have a guru. You have different teachers such as a science teacher, a sports teacher, a music teacher or a dance teacher. There are, as I have told you many times, two types of science: empirical and transcendental. Empirical science, *apara vidya*, knowledge of the material, worldly aspects, you know about. Transcendental science, *para vidya*, is the science of God, *Brahma vidya*, knowledge of God. That is the greatest science and it is the only science that is transcendental. All other sciences are empirical. Whether you want to become

proficient in a transcendental or an empirical science, you need a guru in both spheres. Nobody can become proficient in either of these pursuits without a guru.

In the Indian tradition there are many gurus at different stages of life. The first and foremost guru is the mother. The second guru is the priest or the *purohit* who gives the Gayatri mantra, the sacred thread, the religious samskara. The third guru is the academic teacher who initiates and trains you formally in the different arts and sciences of material life. The fourth guru is the one who puts your mature mind on the spiritual path, who guides you towards mystic union with God or the immortal principle. He gives you the guru mantra and prescribes a sadhana that is suited to your individual need. Therefore, know that there is no difference between the guru and the ishta deva.

You have predicted that bhakti will be the science of the twenty-first century, but how can bhakti take the place of science? Psychology and psychiatry are quests into the psyche, explorations into consciousness, whereas bhakti is a matter of faith. Please enlighten us.

Science in this context does not mean what you mean by science. Bhakti is definitely a science. Bhakti brings about a transformation in awareness, like a chemical change. It causes a metamorphosis in a person's thoughts, actions and mind, as well as in his reactions, responses and lifestyle. These changes can be seen and experienced. Those who reached the ultimate stage of bhakti, like Mirabai, Kabir and Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, have told us one common truth, that bhakti is divine energy, transcendental love. It is not the ordinary emotion of love, it is supreme love.

When your mind is fully submerged in something, when it merges itself unconditionally into something, it becomes one with that object of love. When you turn your love towards God, the mind begins to lose itself in God. It slowly becomes one with God and the chasm between the devotee and God begins to narrow down.

An Indian scientist doing research in America tells us that in the frontal part of the human brain there are certain cells that become activated by meditation on God, by religious conduct or spiritual contemplation. He has named the cells ‘God-modules’. The module is either absent or inactive in most people. Is it possible that an iota of God is physically present in the human body?

It is a very peculiar question and difficult to answer. I accept the God-module part of your findings. I also accept that nine-tenths of the brain is still dormant in humans, but God cannot be a matter for scientific investigation. God can be attained only through faith, trust and sadhana or spiritual endeavour. One has to concede that God is omnipresent and so he is present in the so-called God-module too.

I would like to tell you one more thing. Don't tamper too much with the brain. Many mahatmas, superbrains, have gone mad by interfering with the brain. The brain is most delicate. If by chance you touch the wrong centre in the brain you will be completely derailed. Therefore, don't talk about exploring God through the brain. Talk about the God who is above the body, beyond the senses, who lives without the visible body. He is the subject of faith and devotion. I have studied a lot on this subject. In the past, it was my favourite subject and I have taken part in such experiments during my overseas visits. But I don't want to elaborate on this topic or discuss it now. What really matters is how man can become one with God, how he can become attuned to God, how he can meet God and which path he should tread to do this.

I read the *Ramacharitamanas* regularly. One day this particular portion of Balakanda caught my attention: *Bhavaanishankarau vande shraddhaavishvaasarupinau*, which means, "I bow to Bhavani and Sri Shankara, who are the symbols of faith and deep conviction." Yes, this is correct. I read it and went on, but when I read the third and the fourth lines I was stunned: *Yaabhyaamvinaa na pashyaanti siddhaah svaantahsthameeshwaram*. It means, "Without faith and belief, even the adepts, siddhas or perfected beings cannot

experience the God that is living within.” So, even siddhas have their limitations, let alone ordinary people.

What you have stated about the God-module is not wrong. Let us accept it. Maybe that God-module is also in your heart, but there has to be a way to see him there. God may be in the brain or heart or somewhere else, but you must feel, realize and experience him. Merely talking about him will not help, you need direct, personal experience.

Once, on the plane returning to India, I had a Western gentleman sitting next to me. On board we were served rasagullas. The gentleman asked me what it was. I told him the name of the sweetmeat and he told me he was doing research into Indian sweets. He had also researched rasagullas, which he had written about in his book on Indian sweets, but he had never seen or tasted one and did not recognize it. I had to tell him that it was a rasagulla.

Similarly, God is not a matter of intellectual knowledge or erudition. It is true to some extent that if you talk about God, your time will be well spent; it will create a good samskara in you, it will purify the atmosphere. Everybody accepts it, but this is not enough. Experiencing God is necessary. You must eat the rasagulla yourself. After eating the rasagulla, if someone asks you what it tasted like, you can answer from your own experience of sweetness. Similarly, the experience of God also has to be first hand and personal, and that can happen only through faith and deep trust or belief.

Those two principles of faith and trust, shraddha and vishwas, find their respective personification in our Shiva and Parvati. Shiva and Parvati symbolize faith and belief. Without faith and belief you cannot have divine experiences, even though he is close to you, closer than your breath, closer than your thoughts, closer than your prana, the life force. But even though he is in you and is closest to you, there is no way other than faith and belief. Remember this. If you don't have an experience of God, it is due to a lack of faith and belief. Faith and belief are not intellectual substances; they are inherent in human nature. You believe

that a man is your father. How do you know he is your father? You cannot know he is your father, but he is your father because of your belief, because your mother told you and you have faith in your mother.

Therefore, what you said about the God-module has its due place, but faith and belief are superior. The coming century will be one of faith and belief. The twentieth century has been a century of scepticism. Science destroyed the faith which religions inculcated in man, because religions could not prove things. But in the twenty-first century there will be a revival of faith and belief because man has no other way. If you want to have any divine experiences, you must have faith and belief.

The *Gita* tells us that God incarnates to destroy evil whenever adharma and chaos occur in history. However, it is seen that even good people are destroyed along with the evil ones. Bhishma and Drona from the Mahabharata are such examples. Because of their destruction a national culture suffered a blow. How does God differentiate between dharma and adharma? How can man tell the difference between the two and also bring about self-transformation?

Oh brother, you look too troubled! Now you are sympathizing with Bhishma, the grand old man of the Mahabharata, and also with Drona. Have you forgotten Draupadi's disgrace? When Draupadi was being disrobed in full public view in the court, wasn't Bhishma sitting and watching her being disgraced? When the tender youth, Abhimanyu, was trapped in the labyrinth of the *chakravyooha*, Dronacharya was very much present at the site of this abominable act. Who can call Bhishma and Drona the representatives of dharma or righteousness? Had they been really righteous they would immediately have left the company of the Kauravas. Had Bhishma and Drona not supported the Kauravas, the Mahabharata war could not have continued. It may be that the root cause of the war was Duryodhana, but he went ahead because of the tacit support of Bhishma and Drona. If these

two elders had left their thrones and chosen to be neutral, or crossed over to the side of the Pandavas, the Mahabharata war could have been avoided.

Thinkers, philosophers and historians have expressed their views. Tulsidas and Vyasa are two names that come to mind first and foremost, though there are many more. In the *Gita* (4:7–8), it says:

*Yadaa yadaa hi dharmasya glaanirbhavati bhaarata
Abhyutthaanamadharmaasya tadaatmaanam srijaamyaham.
Paritraanaaya saadhoonaam vinaashaaya cha dushkritaam
Dharmasamsthaapanaarthaaya sambhavaami yuge yuge.*

“Whenever unrighteousness and lawlessness pervade the earth, God takes birth in a human body to destroy adharma.” What you said about Bhishma and Drona being killed in spite of their being righteous is quite erroneous. You cannot put them in the same category as pious-hearted men.

Secondly, war is an inevitability in human history. It cannot be avoided. You may proclaim that you do not want war, but it is only lip service. Everybody speaks against war and preaches to one another their *ahimsa paramo dharmah*, meaning “Non-violence is the supreme principle,” and yet wars take place all over the world. Jesus preached, “Turn the other cheek,” but ask his followers whether they ever offered the other cheek when someone smacked them. What you say is a matter of politics, but what actually happens is a matter of history.

War is an inevitability in human history. War destroys the rubbish and unwanted waste matter. In the twentieth century two world wars took place. Millions of people were killed; the whole culture of Europe changed. After the Second World War it was hard to find a young man surviving in Europe because most were killed. Only the old remained behind, and widows and young girls were forced out of their homes to run offices and factories, to drive cars and machines. Today we see the fallout. These women have become so strong, so sturdy that they can easily manipulate us. They can venture into anything, can go anywhere alone, can run

governments. Who dares to oppose them? Nobody. They enjoy complete freedom in matters of dress and etiquette. They have earned equal rights in education, social status, occupation, wages and lifestyle. This has happened due to the two world wars. A revolution also took place in military science. So war is obligatory, whether it is the Mahabharata war, the First World War or any other war.

Fear neither war nor death

No culture, no civilization should be afraid of war or fear death. Only cowards and slaves talk about non-violence. Death is unavoidable. If you die on the battlefield, it brings you glory. You can also die of diabetes, blood pressure or heart disease on a hospital bed, ignobly. The Lord told Arjuna, "You must fight. If you are killed, you will go to heaven. If you are victorious, you will rule over the empire. Fight you must!" Don't talk about war, but don't fear war or death either. There is no point in criticizing war. Even if you condemn and criticize war, it will definitely take place. Don't close your eyes to the inevitable, the turning point of history is war. War changes cultures, war changes civilizations; the entire polarity changes. Don't be afraid of wars because you cannot stop them. Saints cannot stop them because nature wants wars to happen. It is only after war that many civilizations, religions, cultures and political systems are consigned to the waste paper basket.

War is not a step backward; war is a step forward. Hundreds and thousands of people die, but death is no loss to humanity. Every death pays its own dividends in time. You are going to die anyway either from blood pressure, TB, heart attack, AIDS or something else. Death is inevitable, so why die in a hospital? Die on a battlefield. If you are victorious, well, enjoy a new society. If you are defeated, you are killed and God will take care of you.

I cannot accept this impotent idea. This is the language of impotent people. The Mahabharata war, the war between Rama and Ravana, and the First and Second World Wars

took place because they had to take place. What is so great about death? In fact, what is great about birth either? Insects, mosquitoes, dogs, cats and donkeys breed, and so do humans. Why do you try to avoid that death which is unavoidable? Why do you lament over death? Even great thinkers and philosophers wail over death. Death should not cause grief. Death is the romance of life. One has to take death in one's stride.

I am especially addressing the Indians, who tend to make a big fuss over death. When a leper dies, it is reported in the newspapers, but what is so special about such a death? If a great spiritual guru dies, then the news deserves to appear in the papers. You must take care of your culture. Make your children valiant like Hanuman. Reciting *Hanuman Chalisa* will do. The irony is that children chant the name of Hanuman and are full of fight. Hanuman means fearlessness, strength in body, mind, intellect and many other ways. In *Hanuman Chalisa* it says: *Vidyaavaana gunee aati chaatura. Raama kaaja karibe ko aatura*, which means, "Hanuman is erudite, talented, highly qualified and accomplished. He is ever eager to serve Sri Rama."

Do you know about Hanuman? He was a scholar, an erudite person. *Gunee* means qualified, like a chemical or electrical engineer. He was extraordinarily smart and clever. He would understand even before one tried to communicate. Therefore, Sri Rama made Hanuman his own personal secretary, as Sri Rama himself was an extraordinary boss. He was *chatura shiromani* – the crown jewel of astuteness. Why then has a culture which worships a brave, talented hero like Hanuman become so weak and powerless? A cripple dies in a family and all the members wail in grief. I would think, "Good, he has died and become free. In his next birth he will be born whole and into a better family. The house he lived in was infested with rats and insects; it was leaky and crumbling. In his next birth he will find himself a strong house, built of concrete. He has left this place for a better one." Death is like a change of body.

Whenever an ordinary person gets stuck in a helpless state, it indicates that destruction is near. This is what Sri Krishna had said in a full court after establishing the city of Dwarika. If a similar situation arose today, then would Sri Krishna's words come true?

You have used the word destruction, *vinasha*. I would like to replace it with the word transformation, *parivartana*. Society needs change, revolution. The old social order served its purpose in olden times, but now it is anachronistic, irrelevant. People cannot live the same way as they did before. If those old timers were to live in today's world, they would find it extremely difficult. Most certainly the old society would break down, and only after its collapse would a new society rise. There is no need for us to panic about it.

In India if you travel into the interior regions, for example, the Santhal district, you will see a sixteenth century lifestyle. If you visit Patna, you will see a nineteenth century lifestyle. If you visit Bangalore, you will come across a twenty-first century lifestyle. Our country today is living a life of several centuries simultaneously. You can see a museum with many centuries intermingled in India, whereas if you visit Europe, nowhere, neither in towns, cities nor in the countryside will you see an eighteenth century lifestyle surviving. At the most you will see the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Westerners live the lifestyle of only one century at a time. They dismantle the previous century's lifestyle and throw it out. Those who cannot keep pace with this movement are obliterated. Even today those who cannot adapt to change cannot survive.

In India you can live according to the sixteenth, seventeenth, eighteenth, nineteenth or twentieth centuries, even during the present age. That means Indian society will have a revolution, which the new generation will usher in, and old outmoded systems will yield to new ones. In Western countries, the dead are no longer buried in graveyards. A dead body is immediately destroyed in an electric crematorium. There is no other alternative. Thus society changes and we want it to change speedily for our own welfare.

You were telling us that Rama is parabrahma and Sita is jivatma. The different characters of the *Ramayana* have spiritual significance in their respective roles. Kindly illustrate.

Oh, I just said it casually. In the past I also thought everything in the *Ramayana* was symbolic. I took Ravana, the exile, Ayodhya, Janakapuri and everything to be allegorical and figurative representations, but not any longer. If I take them as symbols now, my sadhana comes to nothing, it is in vain. Now I think of Rama just as Tulsidas and Valmiki have presented him. I don't accept Rama in the spiritual context as he is painted in the *Adhyatma Ramayana*. I gave plenty of discourses on their symbolic significance; for example, how the ten heads of Ravana were our ten senses, and so on. It is a science of scriptural discourse. But a sadhaka should take Rama as a *sakara purusha*, a factual man. Kakabhushundi tells us that Rama and Sita have been consistently the same throughout all their incarnations, as described in the different mythologies of various epochs. The rest of the gods and goddesses appeared in a variety of hues in different times and incarnations. Today I believe in this principle only.

I started my spiritual quest at the age of eighteen or nineteen. I studied a lot, but today, at this age, everything has become very straightforward and simple. Asking questions like this is nothing but intellectual jugglery, brainstorming. Don't waste your time and effort. After all, what you should really care about is Rama's blessing and grace, having the good fortune of Rama's darshan in this beautiful human form and your faith in him becoming deeper and deeper. Sitaji's beautiful character should move our hearts and bring tears to our eyes, our hearts should become softer and softer, more and more tender, and slowly we should merge in the *nirakara*, the formless.

Knowledge and erudition are not going to help us. You feed the donkey and gain neither merit or demerit; it is a wasted act. Similarly, one goes on giving satsang on the *Ramayana*, deciphering the inner meaning, explaining the

symbolism behind all the characters. It is all futile. Instead, I suggest you read the *Ramacharitamanas* as it is, feel and understand it as it is. If you apply your brain, God becomes still more elusive. Aurobindo, an intellectual giant, once said, "Reason was the helper and reason is the barrier. Transcend reason." Now your intellect has become a hurdle. Remove it from your path.

The head has nothing to do with your relationship with God. The head has no place in your connection with the guru either. Previously I was an intellectual. I have racked my brains and conducted many brainstorming sessions on the discourses of Shankaracharya, Vedanta and Adwaita, but now I realize that Satyananda is a nobody. It was like planning to go to the moon without a farthing in my pocket. Gradually I cut off the connection between the heart and the head. Coming to Rikhia has cured me of the intellectual quagmire.

Whether it is Ganesha, Rama, Krishna, goddess Kali or Shankarmahadev, no deity can be understood through the head. When I approached any of these through the intellect, confusion resulted, but once the heart took over and replaced the head, even a stone turned into a talking God engulfed in light. Love and bhakti, devotion, can move mountains. Love is very powerful. Therefore, rely on your heart, on your bhakti, not on your brain.

Satsang 14

December 1, 1997, Afternoon

Please tell us about the panchagni sadhana you did for five years. What is the ashtottarshatlaksha mantra sadhana you did for one year? We heard that you took the whole of *Ramacharitamanas* as one mantra and repeated it, reading it three hundred times in ten months. What type of sadhana will you be doing in the forthcoming year?

I won't tell everything. I will tell you only what is necessary. A part of my body is public and you can see it, but a part of my body is private so you cannot and should not see it. Panchagni sadhana means to sit every day from sunrise to sunset for six full months, in the middle of four fires, with the fifth fire of the scorching sun beating down on one's head. It is practised from Makar Samkranti to Karka Samkranti, 14th January to 16th July. The actual panchagni sadhana is done only for six months, but the dhuni is kept burning the whole year. During panchagni sadhana you may do either japa, recite, or even smoke the hukka or sing bhajans. What is really important is that one sits in the middle of the fires. During the first few days it is necessary to prepare a bhasma of special ashes to smear on the body. Later on this is dispensed with. I made a resolve to do panchagni sadhana for five years. It can also be done for seven years.

Information about this sadhana is given in the relevant technical books. It is a sadhana of penance undertaken to

wash off the karma collected during a sannyasin's mission phase. When one leaves home, it is neither for money nor for increasing the tribe of disciples. A spiritual seeker leaves everything for God, yet over the years of his spiritual quest he earns some karma, although the karma earned by staying at home as a householder and the karma accumulated during a disciple's days in the ashram are different.

As directed by my guru I stayed in his ashram at Rishikesh for twelve years, then left for Munger where the wheel of karma was set in motion with great momentum. It was like entering and living in a chamber of soot. To become stained with the soot was inevitable. A sannyasin has to undertake the panchagni sadhana to undo the karma of his mission life. I had to observe many do's and don'ts, but it is not necessary to tell you all about them, as you are not going to do the panchagni sadhana. Let me keep some secrets to myself. I cannot spill all the beans, otherwise you will go and churn out an article for *India Today* and make some money.

Now let us turn to the ten million eight hundred thousand rounds, one crore eight lakh rounds, of japa. I did this anushtana as the culmination of my panchagni sadhana, at its conclusion. It was done without any personal desire or resolve, without any expectation or demand. It was done for its own sake, as an obligatory act, that being a reward in itself.

After coming to Rikhia things became clearer and my cataracted vision was corrected. Slowly all the unnecessary things began to drop away. I do not mean things related to the world, but those that constituted intellectual knowledge and academic information. Life began to be simpler. My mind became totally and singularly absorbed only in *Ramacharitamanas*. I gave up reading other books and writing. I would get up at midnight, take a bath and sit down to recite, continuing through the day up to four in the afternoon. Then I would sleep for two hours and on waking up resume the recitation, as if in one breath. Thus

I would take fourteen or fifteen hours to complete the *Ramacharitamanas*. This is a simple sadhana.

Only once have I asked God for something. In 1963 I was completely broken and I said a prayer to him. My guru had asked me to propagate yoga, to make it popular. Yet from 1956 to 1960 I could not do anything. Nobody listened to me because I was a most unimpressive young guy. So, I went to my ishta deva and said, "I want to fulfil my guru's command. I want yoga to move forward like a bulldozer for twenty years. Please grant me this boon!" He said, "So shall it be." At the same time I made a promise, which was, "I will give up all that I create by your grace; I will have nothing to do with it." And I fulfilled this promise.

Now I will not make any prayers to God because he knows what I need. What do I need? I do not need anything. I do not have to run an institution. I have no dreams. I have no ambitions. I am God's servant. God has asked me to do the work that is being done in the villages of Rikhia, so I am doing it. He provides me with the means, and as long as he asks me, as long as I live, I will do it.

I was asked to give a good luck kit to every girl in this area who married. I said, "Okay." To give a good luck kit is no joke. Each kit costs a lot of money. Very few Indians can afford thirty to fifty thousand rupees, but now I am capable of providing good luck kits to thousands of girls who are getting married. I do not have enough girls to give God's provisions to. When God wants it to happen, it will! I am only the medium, the agent. I am only the servant. Swami Satyananda does not provide anyone with anything, Swami Satyananda does not do any good to anyone. Swami Satyananda is a servant. Whatever is done, it is not he but God who does it.

Tulsi and Rama

Let me tell you one more point. The first feature of our Akhara is the worship of Tulsi. The second feature of this Akhara is the recitation of *Ramacharitamanas*. Next year I

shall tell you the third feature, as every sect and Akhara has some special feature. This Akhara does not specialize in asana, pranayama or dhyana, hatha or raja yoga, jnana or laya yoga. We preach only Tulsi pooja and daily chanting of *Ramacharitamanas* for forty minutes.

Rama should not be taken as allegorical or symbolic. Rama is Bhagavan, Sita is Bhavani. They should be worshipped as god and goddess. Do not approach them through your head. If you do, you will get inverted vision, like when you practise the headstand. Go to God through your heart and see him as Tulsidas has described him in his *Ramacharitamanas*. Tulsidas had a pure heart and a clear head. He had the darshan of God. We complicate the matter by trying to go to God through the intellect. Bhakti is the simplest approach. Bhakti means just attaching your mind to God. If you cannot do it, then resort to singing his praises and repeating his names. Music and kirtan are the easiest means of reaching God.

In Munger I was a yoga teacher, but now I am starting a new sect of worship and devotion. This is the paramahansa sampradaya, in which worship of Tulsi for health is a must. Health is the first need of every human being, whether a beggar or a millionaire, a sannyasin or a householder. This is not what Satyananda is preaching, but the teaching of the scriptures. The Vedas tell us that for the practice of *dharma* (righteous conduct), *artha* (earning wealth), *kama* (fulfilment of desires) or *moksha* (spiritual pursuit), the first requirement is health. One way of attaining sound health is to worship Tulsi, the queen of all medicinal herbs.

When I came here, I installed Tulsi in a shrine and put her in charge of good health in the Akhara. I prayed to her for sound health at the beginning of my panchagni and anushtana sadhanas. “Mother, from today you are the health minister of this akhara. You are the chief doctor. Take care of the health of everybody here, including me, the old man. Now I am embarking on a very difficult task in this period of my life and I should be free from illness. Physical

fitness is very important for anyone who believes in God.” She has obliged me so far.

Every day I do Tulsi pooja before sunrise and at sunset. Tulsi is the queen of all the herbs. You do not even have to eat the leaf, just pray. I have been here for the last seven or eight years and have never had even half a day’s problems. My spiritual adventure, my spiritual practices, have continued without any interruption. During panchagni the temperature went up as high as 90 degrees centigrade, but I suffered no dehydration. My stomach is okay, my limbs are okay. I used to sit for eight hours with no pain at all. I did not practise yoga. Yoga is not the subject of this akhara. Certainly I did talk about yoga because my guru had asked me to. I fulfilled his command and once I was free of it, my path became bhakti. Now I only talk about bhakti.

In the Western tradition we speak of the communion of saints. What does this mean to a paramahansa? Is there a similar conjunction in the Indian tradition and what influence can be felt on this earthly plane?

Yes, there is such a tradition in India. Every twelve years, when the sun is in *kumbha rashi*, there is a great gathering, a communion of saints and sages on both the invisible and visible planes. It is called *Kumbha Mela*. A planetary conjunction and communion takes place on the non-physical or invisible plane. During those three days, millions of Hindus bathe at the confluence of the Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati rivers. This year it is in Haridwar, last time it was at Allahabad. I was there, so it is always in my mind. Saints and living sages, sadhus and sannyasins, monks, the heads of monasteries, the akharas, the nagas, naked swamis and babas, holy men and women will all gather in their hundreds of thousands with their tents, fires, flags, trishuls, all their pomp and show.

Sadhus, sannyasins and holy men are very powerful people. They live alone, read their *Gita*, do their sadhana, disciplines, pooja and worship. Unlike other religions, we have made a decision not to enter into politics or become

politicians. Sannyasins should neither assist in politics nor oppose politics; in short, they should have nothing to do with politics. The power of sannyasins in India is very great, but we are only concerned with God and with humanity.

The communion takes place on two planes every four years. Four places have been designated for this meeting: Haridwar and Prayag in Uttar Pradesh, Ujjain in Madhya Pradesh, and Nasik in Western India, where the river Godavari originates. It is held at exactly the same time as the celestial communion, according to strict zodiacal signs when the sun enters Aquarius. This very important time period of three to six hours is calculated and announced throughout India. To take a bath in the Ganga or at the confluence of the rivers at that time is very auspicious, and millions go there to bathe. It is such a large-scale event that the Indian Army and the police force are called upon to organize it. Trains, planes, buses and cars from every part of India will go to the Kumbha Mela. Hindus come, not only from India but from every part of the world – Africa, England and America. Illiterate and educated, poor and millionaires, even boys and girls of the pop culture come. The main feature of this great gathering is that renunciates from the three sampradayas of sannyasins, vairagis and udasins all gather there. These three sampradayas have eight main institutions. When they go to bathe in the Ganga, they carry their own flags and banners at the head of their procession.

History relates that when the Huns invaded India, Harshvardhana, the ruler of India, was in Prayag observing the kumbha. His sister, Rajeshwari, was kidnapped by the Huns. So, in India this Kumbha Mela is an ancient tradition from the pre-Buddhist, pre-Jain period. We are very much aware of this idea of communion, which takes place on the earthly plane to coincide with the communion taking place on the higher plane of the eighty-eight thousand rishis, saints and sages, including Vashishta, Valmiki, Yajnavalkya, Bharadvaja, Agastya. The number is precise. Eighty-eight thousand seers, sages and munis meet on a higher level and we synchronize with that meeting by observing the

Kumbha Mela. This has not been explained correctly or scientifically in the Western tradition. It is a recent concept for Westerners. Their concept of communion is limited to just a few raw ideas. They say that there are communities of saints in the Himalayas, who meet from time to time to take stock of the world situation.

Christ was not a Christian, he was a Jew and his disciples were Jews. Christ did not preach Christianity. I am not criticizing your faith, but I am a very frank man; I think like a child. Christ preached something that was not in agreement with his own religion. I also have a right to do that. I belong to the Vedic religion, but if I disagree, I can say, "No, that may have been right at one time, but today it is wrong." That is what Christ said, but you made him a Christian. Your ancestors of two to four thousand years ago were not Christians. What were they? What happened to make them become Christians? Before the advent of Mohammed the people of the Middle East were not Muslims. What were they? What social and political situations took place to make them Muslim? Similarly, Buddha was not a Buddhist. Buddha did not teach Buddhism. He did not even hear the word Buddhism. Buddha taught the four Noble Truths, the four *Arya Satya*, to five of his disciples, in Sarnath. It was after his death, when the first convention was organized in the cave in Rajgir, that the *Tripitaka*, the three books, *Vinaya Pittaka*, *Satta Pittaka* and *Dhamma Pittaka* were established.

We know our history well. We have studied the entire history of Buddhism, the entire history of Christianity, the entire history of Vedic times. I can tell it to you line by line because this is our life. The ordinary person may not know, but we have to know about the world. If you say, "Read the Bible," I will say, "Okay, it is a good book, a holy and inspiring book, a divine revelation." If you say, "Go to church and pray," I will go. We do not mind because we want to unite in the name of God. However, neither jihad nor crusades worked in India. And it will not work. We were what we were, we still are what we were.

Therefore, this communion about which you have asked is very vital to the people of this country. Swami Poonyananda, sitting here, is the head of our akhara. We belong to him, we are his sannyasins. He is the elected acharya, who carries the flag of our akhara. He invited me to attend the Kumbha Mela, but for a sannyasin who has taken a vow not to leave a place, there is no compulsion. Still they invite him. Swami Poonyananda said, "I cannot compel you, but I am inviting you." I replied, "Swami Niranjan can go with his sannyasins". Going to a kumbha is no joke. If Swami Niranjan goes, he has to take battalions of sannyasins, and feed and clothe thousands of people every day. He has to give and give and give. He has to be strong financially as well, but I have told him he can go.

In every religion there are many samskaras and sacraments. What do they mean?

Although they exist in other religions, there are not many. I can tell you about Vedic Dharma. According to the Vedas, there are sixteen sacraments. The first samskara or sacrament is *garbhadhan*, when we know the mother has become pregnant. The second is when the child is born. The third is on the ninth day when a name is given. There is another in the sixth month when the child starts eating coarse food like kheer, rice pudding and so on.

In the seventh year comes *yajnopavit*, when the sacred thread is given. In the past a boy was sent to the gurukul, his guru's home, to grow and develop. There he learnt either carpentry, archery, painting, Sanskrit, languages, chemistry or whatever he needed. In those days the guru taught many subjects. A carpenter would send his son to a carpenter guru. There was a farming guru, a chemistry guru, an engineering guru and so on. Although it is not observed in this way today, the sacrament is still performed. A boy is given a sacred thread and allowed to chant Gayatri mantra and do pranayama. Traditionally, after twelve years he returned to his family and was married. Marriage was also a samskara, a sacrament.

The last sacraments pertain to cremation and an astrological ceremony. Then, after death, when the body has been disposed of, there is the *shraaddha* ceremony, or purification rite, which is done in honour of the ancestors, paying obeisance to the forefathers. It is conducted for a prolonged period, every year for fifteen days in the dark fortnight of the month of Ashwin, September/October. The final ceremony is conducted in Gaya, Bihar, where Lord Buddha received *nirvana*, enlightenment. In Gaya the final obeisance is offered to the ancestors and after that one is free. So, there are sixteen sacraments or *samskaras*.

The Vedic religion does not believe in conversion, rather it believes in transformation. Conversion is a socio-political idea, not a spiritual idea. Practising yoga does not make you a Hindu. You are what you are. You follow your religion, church and tradition. You can read the *Bhagavad Gita*, the *Ramayana* or the Vedas. I can read the Bible, the Koran or Zendavesta. I can pray like a Muslim or a Christian; there is no harm in it. I do not have to change my socio-political creed.

You should understand that changing or disturbing one's social creed is a political idea. We do not agree and never will agree to it. Therefore, a Hindu is a Hindu from the moment he is born. There is no need for a ceremony to initiate him into Hinduism. However, although he is born with Hindu parents, if he wants to follow a different sect for his spiritual life, nobody here will mind. It is up to the child as he grows up to decide which spiritual path he wants to follow. It is his choice whether he wants to follow Vaishnavism, Shaivism or Shaktism. If he wants to follow Buddhism, not for a socio-political purpose but because he likes Buddha's teachings and becomes one-pointed when he thinks of Buddha, that is okay.

What happens in India is that in one family the mother worships Christ and reads the Bible and the father goes to the Shiva temple. They go to all the temples. I have a Muslim friend in Hyderabad, who is as old as me. Earlier he was a senior officer at the Imperial Tobacco Company in Munger. His wife was a brahmin from Assam. They married

when they were in England, a love marriage. Like the Novena worship in Christianity, similarly we have a nine-day pooja called Navaratri, when we worship Shakti, the Divine Mother. During Navaratri, my Muslim friend and his Hindu wife would invite me to sit with them for the worship. So things are very different here. In many religions in the world, if the husband is a Christian, the wife and children also have to be Christians. Of course, now it is changing. These young boys and girls have become very free and, moreover, they are educated and know many things, but there was a time when it was not like that.

How does non-attachment come?

Oh, do not talk about it. You cannot get out of attachment, forget it. It is like asking how to stop the winter, how to stop the sun, how to stop the wind. It is a useless question, but I will give you a useful answer. You should have attachment, but not selfish attachment. After all, here in Rikhia, I am very attached to the people of the local area. I always talk about that man's daughter who is going to get married, that man's wife who is sick, that TB patient who did not come for medicine last time. I am attached to them and they are attached to me, but does this attachment bind me? Is this attachment a bondage? Is this attachment an outcome of my ignorance? Will it corrupt my soul? Will it make me unhappy? Will it make me wretched? No. When you love others who do not come in the category of 'mine', when you have attachment to people who are not yours, who are outside the category of 'we two and our two', at that time, attachment is a very positive and constructive quality.

A person without attachment is worthless, just like a vegetable. If you say, "I have no attachment," I will say, "Get out! I do not need you!" You are attached to your wife, children, property and business. That attachment should be corrected because it produces karma. It influences your mind, it causes worry, anxiety, tension and increases your blood pressure; it makes you weak and sick. It does not make

you happy. All the time you are doing japa, repeating the mantra 'wife, husband, children', so that attachment is not paying off. In fact, it is troublesome. Therefore, with those who are 'yours', instead of attachment you should only have relationships. You must have a relationship with your wife, husband and children. You should leave attachment for others. You must have relationships with your family and attachment for those who do not belong to you. When you are attached to your family, where only self is involved, it is called *swartha*, selfishness. Where another person is involved and self is not involved, that is called *paramartha*, for others.

But this is an ideal answer; to practise it is not actually possible. Human beings are born with attachment. You are a product of attachment because when a man and woman, husband and wife, love each other, there is attachment. So you are born with this samskara. The *swabhava*, the character, the samskara, the action between husband and wife at the time of union, was passed on to you, so you can't help it. Please live with attachment, but in order to balance it have some attachment for me also!

I find your discourses enlightening and inspirational, happy and full of joy. Is it possible to have some time with you for a minute or so to receive your guidance? This question is actually from many people who also wish to see you privately.

When I was in Munger I could talk to you privately. I had a private life and people could come and ask me for guidance. Now I do not have a private life at all. I have not come here to Rikhia for that. The instruction given to me is clear: "Keep away from disciples, money, gurudom. *Eka niranjan*. Just remain as one, in absolute solitude." That is the dharma of a paramahansa. I am not the head of an institution, I am not a guru. I am an individual. I should not and do not want to be a guru. I do not want to give advice. I have no advice to give because you are all neurotic. From 1963 to 1983, for twenty years, you people used to come and ask me the same

questions each and every time. “Swamiji, why when I sit in padmasana is there a pain here?” I would say, “Last year you also asked me the same thing.” You would say, “But that time the pain was there. Now it has moved here.” I would say, “It doesn’t matter, it will go away.” “But Swamiji, is it also a sign of kundalini awakening?” I would say, “Kundalini does not live on the right or left, it lives in the centre!”

The spiritual campaign is an inner campaign. Everyone’s heart is a replica of the cosmos. We are absolute beings so I do not miss anyone. Just forget the idea that I will give advice. If you want to seek advice on spiritual matters, disease or this and that, find another person and go to him. When you are here, please leave on time and do not expect me to meet you after the 4th of December, because, frankly speaking, your dharma is to go and my dharma is to stay alone.

Satsang 15

December 2, 1997

How do you view the role of women in India?

Let me tell you the background first. Whatever I am doing here is in repayment of the debt I owe to a woman. A sannyasin owes his mother the biggest debt. Adi Shankaracharya had to discontinue his world-conquering tour to discharge his duty towards his mother by performing her last rites when she died. All other debts recorded in the register of Chitragupta can be written off except that owed to one's mother. A woman comes into your life as a mother, as a daughter. The strongest manifestation of God in this world is the woman as mother. She is the best of his beauty, the best representation of his benediction and grace. Therefore, as a sannyasin I am freeing myself from the debt to my mother.

Years ago I realized that all the women in the world, including young girls, are my mothers. People spread scandal about me in the past. I let the slander go in one ear and out the other. All women represent your mother, whether eastern or western, modern or traditional, young or old, companion or secretary, urban dweller or villager. I have not forgotten this even for a moment.

In India women have been exploited, ill-treated, dishonoured and weakened. If a sadhu does not support the woman deprived of everything, who else will? This is of primary importance to the spiritual aspect of woman as

mother. People say that sadhus and sannyasins should have nothing to do with the female sex, that they should not even talk to women. I say, "Why not?" You must remember that the race, the tradition, the people who do nothing to uplift their downtrodden womenfolk can never rise. No society can progress without giving their dues to women. Even India will never enjoy prosperity until it makes its womenfolk stand on their own two feet, makes them great and learned.

What are you people worth? You are just like a heavy road roller, a dead weight lying by the roadside, but woman is a precious gem, she is a pearl, a diamond. You should have realized her value, yet such a worthy part of society is reduced to a nonentity. Women cannot go to school, cannot mix freely in society, cannot take a lift from a boy on their way to college. This is their helpless state, especially in villages. Therefore, I have started helping women out by giving them bicycles, and I will continue to do so with God's grace. Each girl will be the symbol of my mother. I do not care about or pay any attention to whatever slander and abuse is spread against me. I will go ahead with my plan, cocking a snook at the critics and gossipmongers.

What are the difficulties involved in the path of bhakti?

If you take up any path of yoga, you will face obstacles. In all the different types of sadhana mentioned in the Vedas and Tantras, in Agama and Nigama, there are hurdles. The only sadhana path that is free of obstacles is the path of bhakti. Bhakti is inspired and sustained by God himself. It is attained only by the grace of God; it is prasada from God himself. You come to bhakti by God's wish, by his blessing. You love him, you are drawn to him, you become attached to him only when and as he wishes. Therefore, when bhakti is his gift, his wish, how can there be an obstacle?

I am telling you from my own experience that the path of bhakti is best. It is the only sadhana that is simple, easy, tangle-free and without hazards, side effects, risks or any chance of going astray. Through my own personal

experience I am reinforcing the teachings of all the sages, great souls, munis, scriptures and holy books. There are no obstacles in the path of bhakti, no difficulties at all.

Bhakti is called *navavidha bhakti*, a nine-fold devotion in which there are nine steps such as *archanam*, worship, *vandanam*, obeisance, *dasyam*, service, and so on. But what I mean by bhakti is just attaching your mind to God. When your mind is attached to a man or woman, it is called *kama*, lust. When it is attached to money, it is called *lobha*, greed. But when you attach your mind to God it is bhakti. For us, bhakti is not an imported item; it is very much indigenous, it is deep-rooted in our soil. It is home-made, made in India. This is our original face, our primordial nature.

Our first glimpse of bhakti was from our mother, then from our family in the form of attachment, affection and friendship, respectively. Then we found it in the form of the romantic relationship. Just as sweets are different forms of milk, and rotis and bread are different forms of wheat, so all love and attachment is a form of bhakti. I suggest you turn all your feelings and attachments now flowing in different directions towards one focus, God. Gather your emotions together from all other relationships and direct them to God.

Now the question of shraddha or faith remains. Don't you fear its absence? Faith is never blind. These days there are many assaults on what is called 'blind faith', *andha shraddha*. Columns are written on it. Even I have used this phrase in my past writings and books, but today I have come round to affirm that belief is never unfounded, faith is never blind. You have three eyes. The normal pair of eyes may suffer from cataracts, but the third eye, which is the eye of faith and devotion, has the clearest vision. It is like binoculars, it is both far-sighted and microscopic. It can discern the minutest detail, it can even see the invisible.

Faith and belief are the two eyes of man. Maya, desires, attachment, greed, mistakes, weaknesses, conceit and vanity can plunge you into delusion, but if you have faith you can never fall into the ditch of delusion. There are many

unnecessary things in your life. Worry about them. Don't worry about faith. All the things of the world, including your father and mother, are slapping your cheek with delusion, but you don't mind because you don't even realize it. However, when it comes to shraddha, to faith, you are concerned about being misled, deluded. What kind of intelligence do you have? Please borrow my intelligence for some days.

In ancient times, a child was given the sacred thread and the yellow cloth and then went to ask for alms. After that, the child lived with the guru for twelve years and then, at the age of eighteen, returned to his family and married. This is just one example of the ancient civilization of this country. This ritual made young people very strong, intelligent, wise and capable of handling *grihastha ashrama*, the householder stage. To find a wife is very easy, but to be a householder is most difficult. Before marriage everything is very quiet, but after marriage all types of complications, needs and desires arise. Honest people become dishonest, people with tranquil minds become disturbed. To deal with that you need a very solid education, not the education your universities and colleges give. You can only receive that type of education in the ashrams.

India has had a very solid tradition, as a result of which the culture and wisdom of this country has survived despite political accidents and the ravages of time. Time has been against us, political situations have been difficult, but we have survived and, not only will we continue to survive, we will also give the world a message. *Maatridevo bhava. Pitridevo bhava. Aachaaryadevo bhava. Atithidevo bhava*, which means, "Mother is a goddess, father is a god, the guru is a god and so is the unexpected guest." This is the mantra of (*Shikshavalli*) *Taittiriya Upanishad*. It explains how a student has to behave. He should not be lazy in his studies. He must have complete respect for his guru and for his gurumata, the guru's wife. He should tend his guru's cattle carefully. He should not eat the alms he collects from the villages, but

place it first before his gurumata, who will then distribute it to him and the other disciples.

Your beloved Sri Krishna Madhava received his education from his guru in Sandipani Ashram, in Ujjain. Rama received his education from Vasishtha, whose ashram was sixteen miles north of Rishikesh, where there is a cave called Vasishtha's cave. Rama, Bharata, Shatrughana and Lakshman lived and received their education in the vicinity of Rishikesh. Therefore, in Rishikesh, where my guru's ashram is situated, we have Lakshman Jhula, Bharata Mandir, Shatrughana Mandir and Rama Mandir.

The Vedas tell us that karmakanda or ritualism is necessary and that it is through rituals and rites that one attains to the supreme loka. But when we come here we see service to humanity and philanthropy. We see worship of the individual soul, jiva upasana, whereas in the Vedas, worship of gods and goddess, not of human beings, is prescribed. What is the difference between the two?

I don't know how people get mixed up in the teachings of the ancients. There are three paths: karma, upasana and jnana. These are also known as karmakanda, upasanakanda and jnanakanda. Here *karmakanda* means the daily rituals of worship for a householder. The sacred thread, the naming ceremony, the marriage rituals and the last rites are all part of karmakanda. But the karma that the Vedas talk about refers to the daily actions, jobs and routine obligations of maintaining a household and everything connected with the care of animals, farming, producing food and wealth.

Upasana means remembrance of God, worship of God and contemplation on God. Wherever worship is introduced in any form, rituals have followed thereafter. Every religion has rituals. Vedic dharma has rituals, Buddhism, Jainism and Islam have rituals, different Christian denominations have rituals. Each sect, religion and creed has criticized the ritualism of others, but has got stuck in its own characteristic form of ritual. This has a history of at least two thousand

years. Karmakanda also gives valuable direction and guidance and, therefore, it is essential. Without rituals you cannot function. No one can escape karmakanda, so there is no use criticizing ritual.

As far as karma is concerned, I use the word 'karma' in the same way as Lord Krishna does in the *Gita*. By karma I do not mean ritualism, but your duties in life. Listen carefully. You are all good at looking after yourselves and your near and dear ones, but you do nothing for others. You don't feel like doing anything for others until some transformation takes place within you. Until and unless there is a change of heart, nobody does anything for others. It appears that the individual comes out of the womb with instinctive selfishness. No one, neither the mother nor the father nor the guru, has taught people to help others, to do something for others.

Vivekananda, the superman of the modern epoch, was perhaps the only divine teacher who exhorted people to look around and serve their fellow beings. I am also teaching this. Think of others, have a heart for their suffering. When you think of others, you think of God. When you eat, do you ever think of your starving neighbours? You are concerned only with whether or not your children and your own family members have eaten. Your concern is limited to your family's welfare. But I am different. I am concerned with the welfare of all.

When I eat, I think of the hungry and the starving, and send food to such houses. When the cold hits me, the first thought that crosses my mind is whether others have a covering to protect themselves from the cold. This is my personal experience, therefore, I can talk to you about it from conviction. I pray to God for supravision, *divya drishti*, with which I can locate hunger and starvation and then do something to alleviate it. Therefore, thinking about the poor and the needy is like thinking about God. To help others is to worship God. If you are able to think about others, you are able to think about God. If you cannot think about others, certainly you cannot think about God; you are only thinking about yourself. It is essential that one should learn to think

about others first, then about oneself. Before eating, have you ever thought, "Is there someone close to me who has no food to eat?" Never, never, never!

The simplest and easiest path

Upasana means you are sitting near to God. I am not talking about charity or social service. To think about others is to think about God. To worship others is to worship God. This is the lesson you have to learn from me, otherwise don't come here. I don't need you or your money. I am talking to those who are travelling on the spiritual path. I am very aware that you are all keen travellers, pilgrims on the spiritual path, that you are seeking a higher, divine and infinite experience. I know that all of you who come here are keen to know something about divinity. You have not come here to waste your time. You have come here to know about that which is beyond name and form, beyond the senses and intellect. Therefore, I am telling you about the simplest and the easiest path. Think a little about others. Have at least some corner in your heart for the suffering and misery of others. If you help your fellow beings even a little, God will most certainly shower his grace upon you.

This is a sadhana, a spiritual practice in itself. Do not underrate it. I am not talking of charity. I am talking about the absolutely classical spiritual system and believing in that. You are not jokers, all of you are seekers. You need something and you come here in order to find a path, a method, a technique. You have not come here for any sort of glamour. This is not a tourist centre. So I have to tell you the truth based on my experience. I have lived a spiritual life for more than half a century. I have practised every form of yoga, from the Himalayas to Rameshwaram, but ultimately I found that when I began to think about others, God began to think about me.

God sent me here to Rikhia. Listen to what I am telling you. Understand it plainly and in a straightforward manner. I am not talking symbolically. I am telling you the facts and

you should understand them as facts. I heard God one day, just as you are hearing me right now. He said, "Take care of your neighbours just as I have taken care of you." That set me reflecting on his words. I told myself, "Satyananda, are you very selfish? Will you eat all the sweets yourself? Will you have the darshan of God all by yourself? What is the use of the *atmajnana* that you attain? How can the world benefit by your spiritual gain and self-realization? You are very selfish, give up selfishness." I said to God, "Show me the path. I am blind. Tell me what to do." Henceforward God began to show me the path. He said, "Give blankets to those who are fighting the cold." In this way, slowly the guidance came in clear terms.

This is the simplest and easiest path in Kali yuga. I am not the first to tell you this. I am repeating what the shastras have preached. One path is to repeat the name of God and the second sadhana is to do good to others. These are the only two ways. Practise repeating God's name for a short period of time, either verbally or mentally, with a mala. You can say, "Om Namah Shivaya, Om Namah Shivaya," "Sri Rama, Sri Rama," "Jesus, Jesus, Jesus," "Holy Mary." It is up to you. I am not giving you initiation, I am only making a suggestion. Just do good to others and your mirror will begin to clean itself. One day you will see yourself very clearly and exclaim in realization, "Oh, I am Brahman." Worship and devotion pave the way to oneness with God.

What is the dharma of a householder? It is said that a householder's life is meant for bhoga and a sannyasin's life for tyaga.

No, no, no. This is all the logic of convenience. To be a householder means to perform karma and service to others in the family and to protect your society. Our scriptures have clearly told us that a householder has to do worship and *daan*, or philanthropy. Every householder knows what his duties are, I need not repeat them. But now circumstances have undergone a drastic change. Urban society is facing



Good luck kits awaiting distribution



Distribution of prasada to Sri Swamiji's neighbours



Prasad rickshaws



Sri Swamiji

acute rivalry, cut-throat competition. Survival is becoming very difficult. A lot of money is needed in order to survive. So, in this changed context, the householder will have to give a fresh thought to his duties.

Is yajna a tantric ritual?

Lalita Amba, Sri Yantra, *Lalita Sahasranam*, *Saundarya Lahari* and this yajna are all part of tantra. In Sanskrit, *aaja* means not only 'goat', but also 'the unborn one'. People here are in the habit of offering an animal sacrifice on any important occasion, such as the celebration of a newborn or a marriage, but don't expect it here. Don't think that because this is a tantric yajna there will be an animal sacrifice. There will be a very different ritual as the happy culmination of Sita Kalyanam. When we announce that it is a tantric ritual, you may think there will be liquor flowing, flesh-eating and sexual rituals. These are certainly associated with some forms of tantric worship, but that is an entirely different version of tantra. You may drink wine, eat meat and engage in sexual interaction by all means if that is your dharma, but don't say it is tantra.

Tantra is a pure science, a science of dedication to Mother power. In tantra we behold God as Mother. You may have heard that the right side is Shiva and the left side is Shakti. You have heard of Ardhanarishwara, the half male, half female God. So here God is perceived as mother. I think God should be mother because we have never heard that father can create, we only know that mother can create. So mother is the creator. She is the ultimate dynamic power. In India we have conceived of her in three forms: Saraswati, Lakshmi and Durga or Kali.

Here you will find a very classical explanation of tantra. This yajna is very powerful, very potent. Many great souls, sadhus and others are coming from far-flung places to attend this yajna. It is a very powerful tool for inspiring and enlightening human consciousness. Lord Krishna explains many details about yajna in the *Gita*. Everything in yajna is

connected with Vedic mysticism. It is an esoteric act, not an exoteric act. I hope you understand what I am saying.

In ancient days, before the advent of many religions, yajna or fire sacrifice was conducted throughout the world. The American Indians, the Incas, the Aztecs, the Babylonians and many other tribes used to practise fire sacrifices. Scientists excavating ancient towns and cities have found the fire pits where the yajnas were conducted. Yajna is involved in Devi yajna, Chandi pooja, Shanti pooja, Deva pooja, Vishnu pooja, Shiva pooja and many other forms of worship. Yajna is very special and you can read what Swami Sivananda and other swamis have written about it in English books.

Satsang 16

December 3, 1997, Morning

What is the meaning of Sita Kalyanam?

Last year we called it Rama Vivaha. *Vivaha* means to carry. The connotation is that you carry a girl to your own home by marriage. But this year I have named it Kalyanam because a man does good to a woman by marrying her. Sita *Kalyanam* means 'welfare, well-being'. Through marriage two types of well-being are attained, social as well as spiritual. In our age-old idiom, marriage is called kalyanam. *Mangalam*, *kalyanam*, *vivaha* and *parinaya* are all synonyms.

The purpose of organizing this grand wedding ceremony is significant and meaningful. In this region a girl child in the family is considered to be a matter of anxiety and worry. For the poor parents, daughters are a burden because it is beyond their means to get them married. The rich do not have this problem, but marriage is an extremely costly affair for the poor and needy. Therefore, I decided to ease their burden by organizing Sita's wedding, thereby doing good to the young brides of these families. Through this wedding celebration I ensure the welfare of many young girls whom I have accepted as my own daughters.

As sannyasins we cannot take part in the wedding celebration, but we can certainly help the parents by arranging the dowry. This is another purpose behind calling the celebration Sita Kalyanam. Last year when we called it Rama

Vivaha we were given nothing except chocolates, sweets and blankets. These are not dowry items. For a dowry, gold, silver, pearls, diamonds, gems, saris, ornaments, watches and such fineries are given, as are cycles, motorbikes, television sets and other such articles.

This year I asked the *mukhia*, the chief of the village, to provide a list of all the newly married girls who are on their way to their husbands' homes. He gave me the names of two hundred and fifty such brides. I told him to spread the news that all these brides would be gifted with good luck kits on the 4th of December, the occasion of Sita Kalyanam. At that time I had nothing to offer them. My coffers were empty, yet I went ahead and extended the invitation to all the young girls in the vicinity.

When I first thought of Sita Kalyanam, nobody understood the purpose behind it, but once we announced it as the occasion of Sita Vivaha, we were flooded with dowry items. Bundles and bundles of gifts started pouring in. In fact, we had no place to store them. Four centres fulfilled the target and sent one hundred and eight good luck kits each. My point is that whatever work you undertake must have a good intention, a purpose of doing good to others. I have been harping on this single point.

Debt to mother

Now the thought comes, what is the philosophy behind such celebrations? Philosophy of action is never abstract; it has a basis in fact. As a sannyasin and as a man I am indebted to my mother. When I talk like this I represent all men. We are all indebted to our mothers. I am indebted to my mother who gave me the secrets of success in life, who guided me and put me on the right path, from whom I imbibed all the good samskaras that percolate through the pores of my body and the whole of my being, and who also let me go and leave home in search of God. You may write off any other debt in this world except the debt to your mother. Even God, Lord Rama, had to discharge the debt towards his mother when

he incarnated as a human being. Mother is the life giver, the jnana giver, the samskara giver. She shapes the destiny of her child.

Just as the future of a tree is embedded in the seed, the destiny of a child is imprinted in the womb of the mother. If the woman goes astray, the man too goes astray. Whenever a child errs, it is neither the fault of the son, the daughter or society. The blame lies entirely with the mother. You may like it or dislike it, that is up to you to decide, but I must tell you the truth. If the seed is faulty, the tree cannot be strong. You may make liberal use of pesticides and fertilizers, but it will prove futile. It is essential that the mother, the nourisher and procreator, is beautiful. It matters little whether she is an ordinary woman or an extraordinary woman.

Today, at the age of seventy-five, I hold my mother exclusively responsible for everything I have achieved and lost in my life so far, for everything that I have thought and done. Therefore, my first priority is to repay my mother. Now what can be done to clear this debt? In India, the majority of women are exploited and downtrodden. Maybe only point nought one percent of women are the exception. An ordinary woman has no means of education, advancement or legal protection, and it is we who have deprived her of all these things. Therefore, I proclaim it as the duty of each and every sannyasin to help and support these women.

I am not a great man. I am a small man living in a small place, so I decided to begin in a small way. Even if I can bring about the upliftment of a limited number of girls, my life will have become worthwhile and I will be satisfied. I don't think I am responsible for all the women of India or Asia. After all, a Muslim can venture only up to the mosque. Therefore, I decided to undertake Sita Kalyanam within the confines of my neighbourhood.

I try to help the girls of this region through education. Sita Kalyanam is also organized for this purpose. I have observed that girls have a special fondness for certain things in life.

First and foremost, the girl who wants to survive and make headway needs stability and security. This is a female's inborn nature. I want to help these women who want to preserve their femininity instead of imitating the rough and tough ways of the male. Wherever she goes, I want her to be the ruler and the queen. Thirdly, women are fond of jewellery and ornaments to beautify themselves with. When you present a sari, a diamond ring or even just a small ornament to a girl or a woman, she is always very pleased. This is her characteristic feature. Therefore, I will give her all the three things here and receive the cooperation of all and sundry.

You have told us that antyeshti, the last rites, is a samskara. Why does the male child have the monopoly on discharging these duties? Why can't a female child carry out these samskaras for her parents? What is the taboo?

It is not that a girl cannot perform the last rites. She can do everything. If she has given birth to and nurtured you, why can't she send you to the grave as well? However, society has decided upon a certain division of labour. These norms were laid down at a time when the social status of women was very low. A widowed woman was totally alone and unprotected once her husband died. She was in a constant state of anxiety about her fate as a widow. She was forced to discard her jewellery, to break her bangles and throw away her necklace. Sometimes she was forced to climb on her husband's pyre and accept self-immolation. All these ghastly compulsions made her unstable and she would go insane. Such an unsteady, unbalanced and oppressed person could not be entrusted to perform the last rites. Such a deranged woman was capable of throwing herself into the fire while performing the rites. That was the background to the introduction of such taboos.

Now, however, in the days of electric crematoriums, a woman can be the director of the cremation. The macabre atmosphere associated with funerals is no longer there. A dead body is put in the incinerator and within five minutes

the ashes emerge, packed in a bottle. In such circumstances it is feasible to have a woman in charge. She could easily press the button and run the electric pyre, enter the data of the deceased in the computer and keep the records. Under such changed circumstances it is wrong to debar a woman on any pretext.

What is luck or fate? How is it connected with purushartha or human endeavour? In satsang we have been hearing that happiness comes from within. Why then and how is it that the unhappiness from the external world affects us?

Even if all these questions could be answered, you would not be helped much. What is more powerful: free will and personal effort or fate and luck or destiny? This has been a moot question facing philosophers and thinkers since ancient times. Volumes have been written on this controversial subject. However, the question is what is the biggest power influencing human life? When your car breaks down, you tow it with the help of a tractor or another vehicle that is stronger than your car. Similarly, to transform your life, to overcome your frustrations and failures, to turn your defeats into victories, to make the weak body strong, there has to be something strong and powerful, and that is your faith in God and the power of prayer.

Focus the whole of your mental yoga on this single point. Do not waste effort in finding out whether fate or personal effort is more powerful, because you will gain nothing. You will go around asking people and receive categorical and exclusive assertions from both sides, but will it make any difference to your life? It is best not to get entangled in theoretical controversies, but to get going with the business of life. You must forge ahead and push your broken down car forward.

Therefore, what is of fundamental importance is how you can bring about a transformation in your life, mentality, desires, anxiety, craftiness, irate and intolerant nature. How can you create a loving and beautiful atmosphere at home? The only remedy is to have faith in God and pray to him

with intense sincerity of belief. Pray to him at any time during the day or night, in solitude and from the bottom of your heart. Talk to God like this, “Prabhu, I am such a bad fellow. I drink and when I come home I ill-treat my wife, who has slogged all day to make a home for me. I fight with her. I spoil the whole atmosphere at home. Prabhu, please turn me into a good man.” You will be transformed from within if, and only when, you introspect sincerely and pray to God to be rid of your weaknesses and foibles. You have to reflect on your drawbacks through introspection, and seek his support to reform yourself. You have to do penance for your wrongdoing. However, your question has no connection with your character and conduct and, therefore, it is meaningless.

Saints, mahatmas and Sri Tulsidas all say, *Mo sama kauna kutil khala kaamee?* – “Who could be more depraved, villainous and debauched than myself?” Instead of apologizing to God for your cunning, villainy and foolishness, you consider yourself to be perfect and everyone else to be bad. Nobody has the courage to face themselves as they are. Everyone should realize what their own flaws and failures are and how their misconduct with family members is responsible for the atmosphere of disharmony. You have to look at your own behaviour, the treatment you mete out to your wife, your children, your neighbours, your pets and other animals. You have never seen an honest reflection of yourself in the mirror. If you look into the mirror carefully, you will see an ugly reflection. You had imagined you were good looking, but the reality is quite different. You will realize that your nose is too short, your beard is scruffy and unkempt. You will see the actuality.

How should we worship God?

It is the Mother who is the preserver and also the destroyer. It is by her command that the celestial beings, human beings and all of creation moves. We should not ignore the Mother. We may worship God, well and good, but as Mother. This yajna is Sri Lalita Amba yajna. There are many books

written in English on *Lalita Sahasranam*. The famous British writer, Sir John Woodroffe, also known as Arthur Avalon, was the Chief Justice in the High Court of Calcutta during the British period. He embarked upon tantric research and wrote a number of books on tantra in which you can find precious information on the concept of kundalini, the chakras, how the lower energy residing in mooladhara chakra ascends and transforms itself into higher or divine energy in sahasrara chakra. In kundalini yoga, the lower energy is known as maya and the higher as shakti.

This is what the yoginis were talking about. Maybe many of you picked it up from their chanting. But the most important thing is that you do not have to understand or define it, you just have to experience it. When you are in an air-conditioned room, you do not have to understand how the air-conditioning works, you should just feel the coolness. In the same way, spiritual knowledge should be experienced directly, not through the medium of intellect or by analysis. You should approach spiritual knowledge very innocently, which is exactly what I did.

Initially I approached spiritual life through the mind, the intellect, through understanding and analysis. For fifty years I wandered and worked very hard. Finally I came down to just one point. Today, if you knew what I was doing, most of you would laugh because you wouldn't understand. After teaching yoga and Vedanta, talking about the absolute self, the cosmic self, eternal skies and expansion of mind, now I worship a plant twice a day and the shaligram, that little stone from the Ganga that I brought from Nepal. I worship Rama, Lakshman, Sita and Hanuman. I worship the peepal tree. Can you imagine?

Be childlike

Christ said, "Be childlike," and you have to be like a child. You do not have to be a think tank, an intellectual, an analyst or a commentator on whether God is the creator or not. Who cares whether God is nameless, formless or attributeless? If

I know that God is nameless, formless or attributeless, what do I gain? What do you gain? For many years you have been listening, defining God, defining Coca-Cola, but it is no use defining something without experiencing it directly. You have to drink Coca-Cola to know what it is, and Coca-Cola is available in a simple shop, for fifteen rupees.

God is the easiest thing in this world to attain. I am being very frank. You can catch him in your hands quite easily. To renounce, to give up, to leave something is the easiest action. You need many years to gather and accumulate something, but just a moment to leave it. The joy you get from accumulating something is not a patch on the joy you get from giving it up. Kabir says:

*Mana laago mero yaar phaakiree main
Jo sukha hai Raama bhajan men
Vo sukha nahin ameeri men.*

O friend, I am lured by poverty.
The bliss that I get from bhajans of Sri Rama
Is not found in affluence.

When you are destitute you are most fortunate, most blessed, because you are close to God, but you are not close when you are rich. This is the teaching of Kabir, of the *Ramayana*, the *Gita*, the Bible and all the scriptures. "Blessed are the poor." Do you all remember this line?

Therefore, renunciation is easy to obtain but, in order to reach God, please take the straightest path. Love God as you love your wife or husband. Sing his name as you would sing in a discotheque. Instead of other songs sing Rama, Rama, Rama. Love him as you love the youngest damsel. Crave him as you crave for money, for dollars. In this couplet, towards the end of the *Ramacharitamanas*, Tulsidas prays to Rama:

*Kaamihi naari piyaari jimi lobhihi priya jimi daama
Timi Raghunaath nirantara priya laagahu mohi Raama.*

It means, “Just as a woman is dearest to a passionate man and wealth to a greedy man, let Sri Rama be dearest to my heart in the same measure.” Love God as you love your girlfriend! Change the channel of passion to devotion! But it is only when you get knocks and blows in the daily battle of life that your mind turns towards the spiritual path. Then viveka and vairagya come. Without receiving knocks and blows none of you get out of your ruts.

Don’t ever pray to God to make your children happy because then you are suggesting that God is ignorant and needs to be told about your children’s unhappiness. Doesn’t God already know about it? On the one hand, you call God omniscient and the saviour of the poor and needy while, on the other hand, you instruct him about what he should do. Stop such begging at once. This is my advice to you from my own experience over the years.

I have asked God for something only once in my life, in 1963, and I am still seeking his pardon for that. At Trayambakeshwar I prayed to Lord Mrityunjaya to help me to carry out my guru’s command to spread yoga. How generously and liberally he helped me. I toured the world like a whirlwind and, with yoga, bulldozed those very Christian countries that had invaded our country with the intention of mass conversion. I am using the word ‘bulldozer’ purposely. It was never like working with a pickaxe and spade. It was a stupendous and massive feat that attained out and out success. I became ensnared for a quarter of a century as a result of that one sentence of prayer. It is very dangerous to pray to God and ask for something. Who knows, if God decides to fulfil your wish, then you will be trapped forever.

Become God’s servant

I left Munger to seek solitude and here, in Rikhia, once again I see myself becoming ensnared. Now I must go to Badrinath where nobody can approach me. I am a loner, I seek solitude, but time and again I have been caught, surrounded by people whom I really do not want to see.

Only once did I ask God for something and here I am paying for it to this day. Therefore, I caution you to think twice before begging God for anything. He knows you and your ways through and through. He knows your tricks. God is watching you twenty-four hours of the day, with eyes fully open. He knows your innermost secrets and intentions. He is watching your every breath, counting each beat of your heart, watching each of your steps. You should only approach someone with a specific demand who is ignorant and ill-informed, like the local district magistrate, who does not know who owns the piece of land you want to buy.

What can you ask for from the one who knows everything? Instead, pray to him thus, "My Lord, I am so weak, so imperfect, so full of vices, only you can redeem me and make me worthy." Go to God like a poor beggar, like a bankrupt. Your money, position and social status matter little with God. Forget it! You should seek oneness with God. You should ask for attunement with God. You should have a very close relationship with God. Whichever deity you feel closest to should be approached with full humility and egolessness. When you rebuke your dog, how does he react? His ears droop and he bows before you. You, too, should be like a dog in front of God. Do not try to be his devotee, his bhakta; be his obedient and loyal dog. There is only a slight difference between the words 'dog' and 'God'. Reverse the order of the letters and in a split second, from God you become a dog. Consider yourself to be God's dog and fawn on him, wagging your tail. I am not joking; I am very serious.

I spent more than sixty years in sadhana. There is no sadhana I have not done at one time or another in my life, but not once did my number come up in the lottery. However, after coming to Rikhia, luck smiled upon me and I got the winning number. I told myself, "Satyananda, now you are a nobody. You know nothing, neither the shastras nor modern science. You know neither English nor Hindi. You are not even a perfect sadhu. You are neither a guru nor a disciple." I began serious contemplation and saw myself to

be full of weakness and vice. I realized that I had no talent, power or qualifications to boast about. There is no virtue within me. Are you all listening, those of you sitting at the back? Listen again. I have no virtue inside myself. I have *kama*, desire, *krodha*, anger, *himsa*, violence, *phareb*, fraud and duplicity, and all types of useless thoughts that come into my mind. My mind is not only a garbage can, but also a commode. Oh Bhagwan, tell me how should I clean it. I cannot do it.

I had thought that I was very pious, very rich, very great, very powerful and it is only now that I realize how ordinary I am. When man begins to realize how imperfect he is, when he comes to see his own shortcomings, it is then that the first transformation begins. A change begins to percolate through to his neighbours, into the people surrounding him, his family members, pets and others. First of all, pay attention to your immediate neighbours and that will at once set off a transformation in your destiny. The whole atmosphere at home will change for the better. The same happiness that had given you the slip will start coming your way again. But for this, first of all you will have to look within.

Satsang 17

December 3, 1997, Afternoon

Sadhus leave the world in search of God. They go to the forests, mountains and caves to meditate upon God in solitude. How can they help to solve the problems of this world?

Oh, it does not happen like that. Your idea is erroneous. You have misread the books. After taking to sannyasa life, first the spiritual seeker has to live with his guru in the ashram and do whatever service the guru orders. There are many ashrams in our country where sannyasins work for the upliftment of people. They work in the villages, dispensing medicines to the sick, propagating religion, teaching Sanskrit and spreading the message of bhakti.

No one leaves their home and heads straight for the jungle or forest. It is not that easy to live in the jungle. One cannot live in the forests even for a day. The mosquitoes will buzz a welcome in your ears in return for a bounty of blood. The scorpions and snakes will bite you to death. These days, if you even try to enter the forest to build yourself a hut to live in, the forest ranger will make it impossible for you to do so. If you try to live in a cave, you will find it is already inhabited by animals because you have invaded their territory. You can enter an animal's cave, but you may never come out!

I went to Kailash ashram in search of sannyasa and on a spiritual quest. I was asked to stay and learn Sanskrit

and Vedanta. Then I went to live in Swami Sivananda's big ashram where I was taught many useful things. Nothing that I learned at school or college helped me in life, but everything that I learned in my guru's ashram was useful. Nobody ever asked me who Ashoka was or how many children he had. On the other hand, the practical training I received in banking, auditing, international law, science, construction, writing, editing and the scriptures all proved to be immensely handy at every step in later life.

Had I gone to the jungles seeking God, I would not be sitting here in Rikhia. Had there been no ashrams or sannyasins in India, the whole country would have been converted to Christianity or Islam, like Europe was. India successfully arrested the onslaught and resisted the invasion of foreign religion and spirituality, although there were a few sporadic cases of conversion due to the mistakes made by some political rulers and kings, who used their power for political gain.

In India it is the sadhu who reaches out to the grass roots level. The sadhu can move about unhindered on the roads into towns and villages. He can enter any place to ask for alms or to spread the message of the *Ramacharitamanas* and the Bhagavat. Therefore, sadhus and sannyasins have rendered a precious service to this country. Tell me, who has produced all the literature and philosophy of India? It is sadhus and sannyasins like Vyasadev, Tulsidas and Valmiki. If you exclude these texts from the mass of Indian classics and literature, you will be left with nothing, whether it is during the ancient or the middle period. Take the case of religion. Vedic religion has influenced the whole world. Except for Islam and Christianity, all other religions accept the doctrine of reincarnation; they accept rebirth. Therefore, do not entertain the erroneous thought that the sadhus and sages who lived like recluses have done nothing for the world, that they have not discharged their responsibility towards society.

Generators of spiritual power

Let me give you an illustration. Where does the electricity you use at home come from? Electricity is generated and distributed from a powerhouse. Similarly, the sannyasins who serve in the ashrams, and the few recluses who live in the solitude of the Himalayas, are actually the powerhouses. In their seclusion they reach such spiritual heights, such depths of sadhana that they become the generators of spiritual power. We derive our energy from these power sources. We are the cables of distribution. We distribute their thoughts and their energy among the people of the world. These sadhus and sannyasins may be unknown to you, but they are not just a few in number. You only know about actors and film stars. If someone were to ask you about the life of Tulsidas, only three or four of you could answer, but if someone asks you the pettiest detail about a film star's life, you can answer in volumes. Therefore, sometimes I feel it is useless to talk to you, yet I go on.

The Kumbha Mela is the occasion for spiritual congregation and the communion of the jnanis. At that time, hundreds of thousands of tapasvis, avadhootas, udasins, vaishnavas and sannyasins descend from their mountain hideouts in the Himalayas. The naked nagas and the bhairavis, or naked women, will also come out of their caves to be part of the Kumbha Mela. Only a real jeweller knows the real value of gems. Similarly, only a real spiritual person can know the worth of these great souls. An ordinary person will pick up the pebbles instead of the gems because he only knows how to buy vegetables. Maybe during the event of this communion, you may come across and recognize a real gem. The forthcoming Kumbha Mela will be the last one of this century. On the 25th of February, 28th of March and 14th of April, when the sun is in *mesha rashi*, these sages, sadhus and sannyasins will come down into the open from their seclusion.

Remember that these sadhus don't go to the Himalayas to do sadhana in seclusion until their respective gurus give them the proper clearance. In my own case, my guru told

me in 1947 that my time had not yet come and that I would have to wait for forty years. You cannot be self-willed in this matter. You have to wait for the command. If you ask your guru, he may say yes, but there is a difference between that and the command the guru gives you on his own. My guru said to me, “Your train is not yet due. You have come to the station too early. You will have to wait for three hours.” When I asked him what I should do during this waiting period, he replied, “Do something to pass your time. Visit the book stall, have tea, smoke a cigarette.” On his instruction I passed my time, waiting until 1988. The guru does not give the green signal to just anyone. Sadhana is not a matter of merely one lifetime. In the *Ramacharitamanas* it says:

*Janama janama muni jatan karaahi anta Raama kahin
aavata nahin.*

Birth after birth the munis try, but at the time of death are not able to utter the name of Rama.

The *Gita* (6:45) says:

Anekajanmasamasiddhastato yaati paraam gatim.

Only after many rebirths does one attain the highest goal.

You have told us that after coming here you did panchagni and ashtottarshatnam sadhana, but we want to know what sadhanas you did in your sannyasa life before coming here? We have read in the books that you did tantric and devi sadhanas and also invoked deities, departed souls and supernatural beings. Who was your hero?

No, nothing like this is mentioned in the books. I know no sadhana. I consider only Sri Rama to be the hero of my life. I was born in the lineage of Ikshwaku. When I was born, I was given the samskara, or baptism, of a kshatriya warrior with wine and sword. Therefore, Rama is, always has been, and always will remain my hero.

*Kaha kahu chhabi aapaki bhole bane ho nath –
Tulsi mastaka taba navai dhanusha baana lo hatha.*

Rama has such lovely attributes. He is brave and courageous. He has fortitude, perseverance and patience. He is honest, restrained, self-controlled, shy and very clever.

Don't bother about my sadhana. I am a simpleton born in a farmer's household. My father was a big landowner. I had to look after the land because no one else was free to do it. My father was in government service and my mother was involved with Gandhi's freedom movement, to the extent that she used to sell khadi cloth in the spirit of selfless service. I took up farming from the age of eight. I would go to the farm on weekends and on Mondays I would return home to attend school. I asked my classmates to make me their monitor because the monitor was given an almirah for his books. Therefore, I could rush to school on Monday morning from my farm, which was a steep climb away.

In those days many sadhakas and sadhus used to pass by our house on their way to Kailash and Manasarovar, and often they stayed with us. At that time it was the only useable route. I used to have their darshan, but I was not in the least interested in them. I did not know what sannyasa was like, nor had I even dreamt of taking sannyasa. That interest came when my tantric yogini gave me initiation.

The whole world is engaged in karma which sets off the cycle of karma. You tell us to do service to others, to do good karma towards others. Will it not accumulate more karma? Can this karma be exhausted?

You have been inattentive. I already answered this question yesterday. You do not create karma when you work for others; it does not affect you. Let me tell you a story that took place many years ago in Munger, when the ashram was newly opened. There was an *adivasi*, an aboriginal, from Ranchi who used to cook in the ashram. He was a very good boy, very honest and diligent. All day he worked hard in

the kitchen, cooking, serving and cleaning the utensils for the twenty-five inmates who were there at that time, then at night he would serve the sick. One day a letter came from his home informing him that his wife was sick. This news threw him completely off balance. I told him to wait for a day or two, and that his wife would get well again, but he immediately took leave and decided to return to his home. While attending to the sick at the ashram, he had remained unaffected, but because there was attachment, self-identification and selfishness in his relationship with his own wife, her sickness anguished and agitated him. If, instead of selfishness, there is only selfless affection, then there can be no emotional disturbance, and non-attachment flourishes.

Whenever you serve others selflessly, whenever you do good to others without any ulterior motive, you do not get caught in the cycle of karma. This type of service is going to be the social philosophy of the coming century. The twenty-first century will not be a computer century; it will be an age in which each individual will have a thought for others. Each age has a pertinent philosophy, and selfless service is going to be the philosophy of the new millennium.

What happens during the yajna?

In India everyone observes yajna, literate and illiterate, educated and highly educated, rich and richest, poor and poorest. When a marriage takes place, there has to be a yajna. When a name-giving ceremony for a child takes place, there is a yajna. When you enter your house for the first time, *grih pravesha*, there is a yajna. Yajna is a very common thing in India. We don't invite anyone to attend the yajna, people come on their own. The moment they hear there will be a yajna in Calcutta, people from here will go there because they believe that celestial beings or divine energies pervade the area where the yajna is performed. Not only the material, physical environment but also the spiritual environment of that place is purified. It is like feeling the coolness when you enter an air-conditioned room. In the

same way, when you enter a particular area which is charged with a highly spiritual vibration, your mind becomes peaceful, pure and elevated.

There are many forms of yajna. This was a Devi yajna. Here the vedi was triangular, but in some places it is a quadrangular. Different types of fireplaces are constructed. All the herbs and materials used in the sacrificial offering are pure because they are always drawn from nature. For this yajna we used three types of firewood: mango, banyan and fig. There are many important types of firewood such as peepal and the experts in the science of yajna can tell you why they are used. Similarly, the oblations differ in each yajna.

When a yajna is conducted, there are four priests present. The first represents the *Rig Veda*, the second the *Yajur Veda*, the third the *Sama Veda* and the fourth the *Atharva Veda*. During a yajna the method of chanting the mantra is not like reading poetry. The chanting of the mantra has a system, a grammar, just like the seven notes *sa, re, ga, ma, pa, dha, ni, sa* comprise the grammar of music. For chanting mantras there are three notes: high, middle, and low. These sannyasins have to practise for many years to reach this stage of perfection. Moreover, each Veda has a different grammar for pronunciation. The *Rig Veda* is different from the *Yajur Veda*. The ascensions of the Vedas in North India and South India also have a different style. North Indians belong to *Shukla Yajur Veda*. These are very classical aspects I am talking about. Therefore, the right priests have to be chosen to conduct the yajna. For the Devi yajna, women priests are the best. They conduct it very well and they will draw better results.

Swami Sivananda preached “Be good, do good.” How can we become good? How can we do good? What is the definition of doing good?

What were you doing all the time when I was harping on this very point? It seems you were talking instead of listening to

me. I have been telling you how to become good. It takes a very long time to build a house and just an hour to pull it down. Therefore, go to God in supplication. Seek God's help. God will most certainly help you.

In the *Gita*, Sri Krishna tells us about the characteristics of the bhakta or devotee. Here we are becoming initiated onto the path of bhakti. Can we acquire all the qualities of the bhakta, like those described by Sri Krishna in the *Gita*, by practising what you preach to us?

Listen, in this world man has two possessions. One is his heart and the other is his head. Bhakti has to do with the heart and not with the head. The heart expresses itself as bhakti. The century you are about to enter will be the century of bhakti, the keynote will be bhakti. All religions, sects, creeds and philosophies will have to adopt bhakti.

Satsang 18

December 4, 1997

All of you know that Sita's father, Janaka, had decided that only the one who could lift and string Shiva's bow would wed Sita. This bow had been ordained to Janaka's family by Lord Shiva; it was their family heirloom. When Sita was just five or six years old, she happened to go into the room where the bow was kept. Her doll fell under the bow, but she could not reach it so she moved the bow. Janaka exclaimed, "What's this? This small child is able to move the bow. Impossible!" He then decided that this extraordinary girl should have an extraordinary husband and proclaimed, "Only he who can string this bow will wed my daughter, otherwise she will not marry."

Sita's swayamvara

Years later, when Sita was ready for marriage, kings and heroes were invited. In those days, it was the custom for the girl to choose the man she wanted to marry. This custom does not prevail in India today. It was discarded after this country was invaded, but it was an Indian custom known as *swayamvara*, which literally means 'choose yourself'. At the swayamvara, boys who are none other than kings, emperors, heroes and invincible conquerors are all brought into the assembly. To be invited to the swayamvara it was not just important that they be rich, they had to be mighty and

powerful too. The girl would then choose one of them for her husband. But in Sita's swayamvara the condition was that only he who could string the bow would win her hand. Many kings tried to string the bow, but they were not successful. One day, Guru Vishwamitra was present with Rama. He ordered Rama to string the bow. Rama lifted the bow, strung it and in the process broke it into two pieces.

In between these episodes there is an entire gamut of emotional factors. What are they and what do they signify? First of all the kings could not break the bow. Janaka became worried, thinking, "If nobody can string the bow, my daughter will remain a virgin." To keep a virgin daughter at home is not and has never been the custom in India. It is a sin, a social error. Indians, particularly Hindus, will not accept the idea of an unmarried daughter remaining at home, and this custom is still alive today. So Janaka was very worried and asked, "What has happened? Where are the mighty people? Are they all dead?"

Then Lakshman, Rama's brother, became very angry. He was always a firecracker, exploding at every little thing. He exclaimed, "What nonsense is this king talking? He says that there are no mighty people in this world. If Janaka were to invite me, I could lift the bow and break it into two pieces, like a lotus stalk!" Sita was also greatly worried. When she met Rama for the first time in the garden, she saw this very handsome boy picking flowers for his guru and perspiring. She became spellbound because she recognized him at once, and said to herself, "Oh yes, this is my own darling, but my father has made this condition about the bow."

Sita is Mahashakti, Adishakti, and Rama is the supreme God. The divine God and his maya have reincarnated as Sita and Rama. When God incarnates in the physical body, he is subject to the gunas of prakriti. Incarnation does not take place without being subject to the gunas of prakriti because God is nameless, formless and attributeless. He has no place, no name and no colour, but when he wants to incarnate, he has to subject himself to the laws of prakriti, which are

birth and death, sorrow and joy. You and I are both subject to prakriti; the whole world is subject to prakriti. Therefore, even though she is Adishakti, when Sita is born into maya, she is also subject to the three gunas of prakriti, as is Rama.

So, Sita is worried because she really likes Rama. She thinks, “If Rama perspires when he is picking flowers, how will he be able to fix the bow?” But, in fact, Rama was not sweating because he was picking flowers. The problem was that when Rama saw Sita, he also became completely hypnotized. He controlled himself, however, saying, “No, this is not right. I am a Raghuvanshi. I am the scion of a great race, I have a tradition, I have a heritage, I have a dharma. I belong to the dynasty of Raghu, the great king. How is Rama expected to behave? He shouldn’t have these feelings for a woman who is not his wife. Sita is not my wife. I can look at her, but I can’t go beyond that. I can’t direct my passions, emotions and desires towards her.” So Rama was perspiring because he was worried. Afterwards, when the bow had been broken, Sita took the garland or *varmala* to Rama. *Var* means ‘chosen’, *mala* means ‘garland’. When a woman chooses a man as her husband, the first thing she does is to garland him.

This is a very straightforward story, narrated by Tulsidas in simple language. It has also been written by Adi Kavi Valmiki. His *Ramayana* is most beautiful, but for Valmiki, Rama is a perfect man. Valmiki has narrated the story of Rama as the perfect man whereas Tulsidas has narrated the life of Rama as the incarnation of the absolute principle, parabrahman, paramatma, the totality the absolute self in substance.

First duty

To help with a daughter’s marriage is your first dharma. In our country to marry a daughter is the most important of all duties. That is the top ranking duty. If you can’t marry your daughter properly, you are not paying your proper obligation to society. You have to give your daughter’s hand

in marriage. This is your duty and obligation too. The culture of India teaches us that you can fulfil your obligation to society, to history, to civilization and to the culture, only if you get your daughter married at the right time to the proper husband, in the right way.

There are two types of cultures – robust and fragile. A fragile culture should be handled with care. With a robust culture it does not matter. You can turn it upside down or sideways, roll it or throw it and it will not break. We want that robust culture. No matter if it is rich or poor, literate or illiterate, we don't care. Let the country remain illiterate, but the culture has to be robust because political history and the ravages of time will not pardon anyone. History meets with accidents. Egypt met with an accident, Greece and Rome met with accidents. Historical accidents are not infrequent and it is very important that the robust cultures of humankind be preserved. The mantra for preserving the seed of this culture is, "Have your daughter married at the right time, to a proper person, in a very proper way." This is the dharma of our culture, religion, society and nation, and the dharma of all parents.

Are women suited only for marriage or can they be sannyasins?

Women qualify for householder life and also for sannyasa. Both qualities are inherent in them. In fact, it is men who have difficulties. Not all men qualify for sannyasa, but most women do. The very nature of women, their physical, mental and emotional make up, can give them greater success in spiritual life. Wherever a sannyasin goes, wherever teachers go, to any part of the world, whether it is India, Africa, America, UK, Germany, Switzerland or Greece, the attendance at spiritual meetings is sixty to seventy percent female and thirty to forty percent male. Women have a natural inclination for spiritual life, not only in India but in Europe too. Most sannyasins arriving in Europe from India find that their helpers are women.

When I went to France for the first time, Swami Devatmananda was my helper and then later Swami Yogabhakti, Micheline Flak. In England there is Swami Pragyamurti, and in Greece, Swami Sivamurti. Women have a natural quality; they imbibe the truth of spiritual life. Spiritual life, religious life is not foreign to them; they are at home with it. They can manage without a teacher or a guru because the nature of women is very close to the spiritual Lord. Unfortunately, however, they have been barred from the churches and mosques. It is in India that the doors of spiritual life are open to them.

In the fifteenth century, Mirabai, and later many other great women, renounced and came to the spiritual path. They took to the path of bhakti. In our age there are many outstanding women like Anandamayi Ma, the Mother of Pondicherry, and Swami Kankarashwarananda. In India, we welcome them with open hearts. We don't have the feeling that 'she' is a female and 'I' am a male. A woman can be a natural guru. Our scriptures say that the mother is the first guru – *Mata prathama guru*. When the mother is the first teacher, it is accepted that she has the quality of a guru. You can't make someone a guru. The quality of a guru is inherent, even as the quality of gold is inherent in the ore.

So, women are absolutely qualified to marry, to produce children and to look after a home, but they are also qualified to take sannyasa. Even as they are qualified to grow beautiful hair, they are also qualified to shave it off. I always had this perception in mind. Often I was not properly understood, but Swami Satyananda is a truck; he doesn't care. I do things my own way because I go by my realization, not by your biased, limited opinions. What do I care for your opinions? But certainly, a time has to come when religions recognize the role of women in the progress and evolution of religion and spiritual life. There could also be a woman Jagatguru. The Pope should be a woman, a Mama instead of a Papa. What do you say?

Glossary

- Adwaita Vedanta** – non-dualistic philosophy of Shankara.
- Antah karana** – experienced or manifest mind; internal instrument.
- Anugraha** – divine grace.
- Anushthana** – resolve to perform mantra sadhana for a particular period of time with absolute discipline.
- Apara vidya** – worldly or lower knowledge.
- Aparokshanubhuti** – direct, actual experience.
- Ardhanarishwara** – Shiva and Shakti united in one form.
- Artha** – material need, prosperity.
- Ashrama** – stage or period of life, of which there are four according to the ancient Vedic ashrama tradition, viz. brahmacharya, grihastha, vanaprastha and sannyasa.
- Ashtottarshatnam sadhana** – eighty million mantra repetitions.
- Asura** – demon, enemy of the gods.
- Atichatura** – very clever person.
- Atma** – the self, beyond mind and body, spirit, soul.
- Atmabhava** – feeling yourself in others.
- Atmachintan** – reflection on the self or atma.
- Atmajnana** – direct knowledge of the self.
- Atmavichara** – enquiry into the self or atma.
- Avidya** – ignorance.
- Bhakta** – devotee.

Bhakti – complete devotion to a higher principle of life; love for all beings; devotion as service.

Bharat Natyam – traditional school of dance; classical text on dance.

Bhavana – feeling, emotion; ability to perceive subtle vibrations.

Bhiksha – begging, for alms.

Bhoga – experience of, and craving for, pleasure and enjoyment.

Bichiya – toe rings.

Brahmacharya ashrama – first stage of life up to twenty-five years of age, devoted to learning and studying.

Brahmajnana – knowledge of Brahman.

Brahman – ultimate reality.

Brahmanubhuti – experience of Brahman.

Brahmastra – unfailing weapon of spiritual power.

Chaitanya – eternal consciousness.

Chakor – a bird like a partridge, which is said to feed on moon beams.

Chatak – a bird like a cuckoo, which is said to only drink rain drops.

Chitabhoomi – cremation ground.

Daan – gift, philanthropy.

Dahej – inheritance.

Dareshana – desire for sensual enjoyment.

Dasya bhava – devotion of a servant to his master.

Deenabandhu – friend to the unfortunate.

Devata – illumined form, divinity that dispels the darkness and reveals the hidden essence.

Dharma – natural role we have to play in life; duty; righteous conduct.

Dhuni – sadhana fire.

Divya drishti – divine vision.

Dwiragaman – traditional ceremony held to farewell a bride when she goes to live in her husband's house for the second and final time.

Ekagra – one-pointed.

Garbhadhan – traditional ceremony when a woman conceives.

Gharwali – wife as head of the household.

Grih pravesha – traditional ceremony conducted when a newly built house is entered for the first time.

Grihastha ashrama – second stage of life; householder, married life from twenty-five to fifty years.

Guru – dispeller of darkness.

Hanuman – powerful monkey chief; represented as a monkey of extraordinary strength and powers which he manifested on behalf of Rama, the idol of his heart.

Ichcha – wish, desire, will.

Ichcha shakti – omnipotent force of desire.

Indriya – sense organ.

Ishta devata – personal deity.

Ishwara – higher state of existence and consciousness.

Jada – inert, motionless.

Jagatguru – universal guru; special title given to shankaracharyas, the spiritual heads of the modern sannyasa traditions.

Janaka – name of a famous king Videha of Mithila, father of Sita.

Jayamala – garland of victory.

Jivatma – individual soul.

Jnana shakti – the capacity to know.

Jnanendriyas – five senses of awareness.

Jyotirlingam – self-existing, oval-shaped stone symbolizing Lord Shiva; there are twelve such lingams in India.

Kaivalya – final liberation; state of consciousness beyond duality.

Kalyanam – welfare, well-being.

Kali yuga – current era of the world, difficult and full of strife.

Kama – emotional need or fulfilment.

Kamana – hidden desires.

Kangan – bracelet.

Karana sharira – causal body.

Karma – action and result; also implies devoted action to alleviate the suffering of the afflicted.

Karka Samkranti – summer solstice, 16th July, when the sun enters the sign of Cancer.

Karmakanda – the part of the Vedas that relate to ceremonial acts and sacrificial rules; daily rituals of worship for a householder.

Karmendriyas – five senses of action.

Kartik Poornima – full moon day of the lunar month of Kartik (October/November).

Kinnaras – celestial beings.

Kriya shakti – ability to act for the fulfilment of a desire.

Kshatriya – warrior caste.

Kshipta – dissipated mind.

Kumbha mela – huge festival held every twelve years when the sun is in kumbha rashi, rotating between four sacred locations on the Ganga (Allahabad, Nasik, Varanasi and Hardwar).

Lakshman – brother of Rama; hero of the *Ramayana*.

Lokeshana – desire for recognition.

Makar Samkranti – winter solstice, 14th January, when the sun enters the sign of Capricorn.

Mangalasutra – necklace worn by married women.

Marga Sheersha – ninth month of Hindu year, November/December.

Maya – illusive power of creation.

Moksha – liberation from the wheel of birth and death.

Moodha – dull state of mind; attribute of tamas.

Mukhia – village chief.

Nathani – nose ring.

Navadha bhakti – nine stages of bhakti.

Nirakara – formless, unmanifest.

Nirodha – complete cessation of the patterns of consciousness, when the mind is under control.

Nirvikalpa samadhi – state in which the mind ceases to function and only pure consciousness remains.

Panchagni vidya – knowledge or science of the five fires.

Panchayat – village community.

Para vidya – direct knowledge of God.

Paramahansa – ‘supreme swan’; highest stage of spiritual life; a tradition of sannyasa.

Paramartha – the highest truth, reality.

Paramatma – supreme self; atma of the entire universe, of the individual as well as the cosmos.

Parivrajaka – wandering mendicant, ascetic; person on first stage of renunciation.

Pooja – worship, rites.

Prakriti – active principle of the manifest world.

Prarabdha – the portion of karma that determines one's present life.

Prasad – blessed object; grace, purity.

Purashcharana – observance consisting of the repetition of a mantra.

Purusha – pure consciousness.

Purushartha – personal effort; the four goals to be attained in life: artha, kama, dharma and moksha.

Raga – attraction.

Rama – hero of the *Ramayana*, seventh incarnation of Vishnu.

Ramacharitamanas – the story of Lord Rama as a poetic composition written by Goswami Tulsidas.

Ramayana – an inspired book in verse describing the life of Rama; the historical version is written by Valmiki in Sanskrit, the devotional version by Tulsidas in a colloquial language, Avadhi.

Ritambhara prajna – that truth obtained in the super-reflective state of samadhi; cosmic experience, according to the raja yoga of Patanjali.

Saguna – with form or attributes.

Sakara – with form, manifest.

Samkirtan – singing of God's name.

Sampradaya – sect, tradition.

Samskara – unconscious memory, mental impression.

Sannyasa – dedication; complete renunciation of the world, its possessions and attachments.

Sat – positive, real, truth.

Sat karma – an action that will help others.

Sat vichara – positive thinking.

Savikalpa samadhi – kind of samadhi in which the mind retains still retains its mental impression.

Seva – service.

Shaktipat – transmission of spiritual energy.

Shaligram – black, oval-shaped stone, symbol of Vishnu.

Shanti – peace.

Shastras – classical texts.
Shisya – one who has come to learn; disciple.
Shivalingam – black oval-shaped stone symbolizing Shiva.
Shraddha – faith.
Shraaddha – commemorative rites for deceased ancestors.
Sita – an incarnation of Shakti as the wife of Lord Rama.
Smashan bhoomi – burial ground.
Smritis – Vedic texts transmitted by memory.
Sneha – affection.
Solah sringara – sixteen items of beautification traditionally given to a bride.
Sthula sharira – gross body.
Streedhanam – property and wealth belonging to a woman.
Sukshma sharira – subtle body.
Sushumna – central nadi in the spine which conducts kundalini or spiritual force.
Swayamvara – selection of husband by a girl in a public ceremony.
Swartha – selfishness.
Tapasvin – an ascetic.
Tapasya – practice of austerity.
Tapobhoomi – place where austerities are practised.
Tulsi – holy basil plant.
Tulsidas – author of the *Ramacharitamanas*.
Tyaga – renunciation or gradual disassociation of the mind from worldly objects.
Udasin – a stoic; indifference.
Upasana – personalized form of worship.
Vairagya – dispassion.
Varmala – garland presented by the bride to her husband at the time of the swayamvara.
Vanaprastha ashrama – third stage of life from fifty to seventy-five years of age; retirement from worldly life in order to practise sadhana in relative seclusion.
Vasana – seed or inherent desire.
Vasishtha – celebrated seer, family priest of the solar race of kings and author of several Vedic hymns.

Vedanta – one of the six systems of Vedic philosophy; ‘end of perceivable knowledge’.

Vedi – altar.

Vikshipta – oscillating state of mind.

Vishad – unhappiness.

Vitteshana – desire for material security.

Vivaha – marriage.

Yajna – sacrificial rite, offering oblations to the fire.

Yajnopavit – sacred thread.

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Swami Satyananda was born in Almora (Uttaranchal) in 1923. Drawn to spiritual life from an early age, he left home at the age of eighteen, and in 1943 surrendered himself to Swami Sivananda in Rishikesh who initiated him into Dashnami sannyasa in 1947. He served his guru for twelve years, perfecting every aspect of spiritual life. Thereafter, he travelled throughout the Indian subcontinent as a wandering ascetic.



Realizing the need of the times as scientific rendition of the ancient system of yoga, he founded the International Yoga Fellowship in 1956 and the Bihar School of Yoga in 1963. During the next twenty years, Swami Satyananda hoisted the flag of yoga in every corner of the world, consolidated BSY into a foremost institution of yoga, and authored over eighty major texts on yoga, tantra and spiritual life.

‘Satyananda Yoga’ became a tradition which combines classical knowledge with experiential understanding and a modern outlook. In 1984 he founded the Yoga Research Foundation to synchronize scientific research and yoga, and Sivananda Math to assist the underprivileged. In 1988, at the peak of his achievements, he renounced everything and adopted kshetra sannyasa, living as a paramahansa ascetic. In 1989 Rikhia was revealed to him, where he came to live and performed higher vedic sadhanas in seclusion. Receiving the command to provide for his neighbours in 1991, he allowed the ashram to help the underprivileged villages in the region. From 1995 onwards, he performed a twelve-year Rajasooya Yajna with the sankalpa of peace, plenty and prosperity for all, and in 2007 he announced the establishment of Rikhiapeeth with its mandate to ‘serve, love, give’.

Swami Satyananda attained mahasamadhi, a yogic accomplishment of discarding the body at will to become one with the universal consciousness, in 2009, in the presence of his disciples.



SATYANANDA YOGA
BIHAR YOGA

*“For one with an open heart,
the whole world is one neighbourhood.”*

Bhakti Yoga Sagar Volume 5 consists of satsangs given by Swami Satyananda Saraswati in 1997 during the Sita Kalyanam festival in Rikhia, India. During this festival, organized for the welfare of the newly wed brides from the local villages, Sri Swamiji answered questions on such topics as how to develop love and compassion for others through giving and serving, how to manage the mind and emotions through devotion to God, the guru-disciple relationship, his work to uplift the needy villagers living in his neighbourhood, the position of women in society, marriage, family life and education.

With his incomparable wisdom and humour, Sri Swamiji explains how and why people must change and adapt in order to meet the needs of the 21st century.

Includes 16 colour photographs.



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